

FOREST SANGHA



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news letter

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The Forest Sangha Newsletter

Forest Sangha Newsletter represents the monasteries founded by Luang Por Sumedho, with an emphasis on those in Britain. It is currently published once a year. To receive each issue by post, or to receive an email notification when it becomes available on the website, please request to be put on the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* postal mailing list or the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* email notification list by emailing fsn-mailer@amaravati.org or writing to **Forest Sangha Newsletter, Amaravati** (full monastery address on the back page).

KUSALA HOUSE RETREATS 2014

RETREATS AT ARUNA RATANAGIRI are held at Kusala House, a lay facility located next door to the monastery buildings and are open to both men and women. Meditation instruction is provided by the senior monk leading the retreat, with periods of sitting and walking meditation typically scheduled for the morning, afternoon and evening. A Dhamma talk usually follows the evening sitting.

Mixed Retreat 9–11 May (Weekend)

Led by Ajahn Tiradhammo

Mixed Retreat 2–9 August (Eight Days)

Led by Ajahn Abhinando

Mixed Retreat 1–6 September (Six Days)

Led by Ajahn Puñño

Mixed Retreat 12–14 September (Weekend)

Led by Ajahn Sucitto

Male only 22–26 September (Five Days)

Bodywork in Buddhist Practice

Led by Ajahn Kalyāno

For more information or to book a place on any of these events, please contact Kath Jones on 0120 7283 361 (mobile: 0770 7621 717) or email: retreats@ratanagiri.org.uk

**Kusala House, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery,
Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland, UK**

www.ratanagiri.org.uk/retreats/

KATHINA 2014

This year the Kathina season commences on 9 October, and continues until 6 November. Kathina celebrations or robe offering ceremonies scheduled to be held in the following monasteries are listed below:

AMARAVATI (HERTFORDSHIRE)

2 NOVEMBER

CITTAVIVEKA (WEST SUSSEX)

26 OCTOBER

ARUNA RATANAGIRI (NORTHUMBERLAND)

19 OCTOBER

HARTRIDGE (DEVON)

12 OCTOBER

ABHAYAGIRI (USA)

12 OCTOBER

BODHINYANARAMA (NEW ZEALAND)

TBA

DHAMMAPALA (SWITZERLAND)

12 OCTOBER

SANTACITTARAMA (ITALY)

12 OCTOBER

Anumodanā

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Online PDF – The online edition of FSN uses a convention to disguise email addresses from spam by rendering them as follows: name@organization.com is written: name at organization dot com. You will need to render 'at' and 'dot' back to the original format.

Cover photo – Circumambulation of the newly consecrated Ananda Maitreya Stūpa at Cittaviveka.

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Somdet Buddhajahn

by Luang Por Sumedho

On 10 August 2013, Somdet Buddhajahn, the acting Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, passed away at the age of 85. In this article below, Luang Por Sumedho reflects on Somdet Buddhajahn's influence on his spiritual development, and also expresses his gratitude for the Somdet's long-term efforts, generosity and compassion in supporting our Sangha over a period of many years.



Breaking news:

Published online on 10 August 2013 at 11.09

Somdet Kiew dies at 85

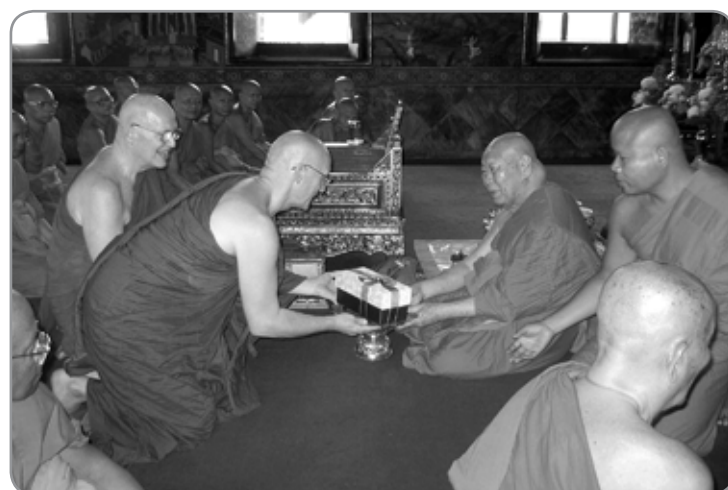
Somdet Phra Buddhajahn, acting Supreme Patriarch and abbot of Wat Saket Wora Maha Wihan, died of a blood infection at Samitivej Hospital on Saturday morning. He was 85.

Somdet Buddhajahn, the revered Buddhist monk widely known as Somdet Kiew, was born on 3 March 1928 on Koh Samui, an island in Surat Thani Province.

When the late Supreme Patriarch, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasangworn Suvaddhana Mahathera, became ill and was admitted to Chulalongkorn Hospital in 2002, Somdet Buddhajahn was appointed as acting Supreme Patriarch, assuming this role in 2004.¹



His Holiness Somdet Phra Buddhajahn



Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Pasanno making offerings to Somdet Buddhajahn at Wat Saket, Bangkok.

WHEN I RECEIVED THE NEWS OF HIS DEATH I WASN'T TAKEN BY SURPRISE, SINCE THE SOMDET HAD BEEN SERIOUSLY ILL FOR SEVERAL YEARS. A few weeks before this I had gone to Samitivej Hospital in order to pay respects to the Somdet, but was not allowed to see him because he was in intensive care.

My first meeting with Somdet Buddhajahn happened fortuitously on the train to Nong Khai in 1966. I was then a layman who was on my way to take *sāmaṇera* ordination at Wat Srisaket in Nong Khai. I was travelling first class and there I met Somdet Buddhajahn, who was then known as Phra Brahmgunaporn. At that time I knew absolutely nothing about the Thai Sangha. I had been living in Malaysia for two years teaching English, and was taking the bold step of commitment as an ordained novice, a *sāmaṇera*. The Somdet was travelling to Vientiane. I told him of my intention to ordain at Wat Srisaket and politely invited him to attend my ordination. He gave me one of his benevolent smiles and wished me well.

¹ The Supreme Patriarch, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasangworn Suvaddhana Mahathera, died on 24 October 2013 at the age of one hundred.

Several years later, when I had already taken the Bhikkhu *Upasampadā* (Higher Ordination) and was under the training and tutelage of Luang Por Chah at Wat Nong Pah Pong in the Province of Ubon Rajathani, I happened to be in Bangkok. My preceptor, Phra Dhammapariyatimuni from Wat Srisaket in Nong Khai, invited me to go with him to pay respects to Phra Brahmgunaporn, the Head Monk of Wat Saket in Bangkok. It was then that I remembered the chance meeting on the train to Nong Khai in 1966.

Somdet Buddhajahn invited me to stay at Wat Saket whenever I was in Bangkok. During the times that I stayed there, I had many opportunities to meet with Somdet. He enjoyed Dhamma discussion and encouraged me in every way to develop meditation. He knew of Luang Por Chah and showed a great interest and respect for him and his way of training and practice.

Somdet Buddhajahn was originally from Koh Samui. He was an admirer of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, abbot and founder of Wat Suan Mokkh in Surat Thani Province. Luang Por Chah was also a great admirer of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's teaching, and encouraged his disciples to read the published literature coming from Wat Suan Mokkh in those days. In fact, I learned to read Thai by translating the pamphlets of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu. So I enjoyed my meetings and Dhamma discussions with Somdet.

I remember one evening when Somdet invited me to accompany him to attend the evening chanting at a Mon temple in Bangkok. I had heard of the ethnic group called 'Mon' but had assumed that they had been absorbed into the Thai population. Somdet Buddhajahn seemed to have an interest in and the intention to help, assist and protect old customs, traditions and minorities within the circle of his influence. His respect for the Mon tradition and the pleasure of listening to their particular way of chanting Pali, the determination to continue the old Mahanikaya way of chanting and the particular way the bhikkhus at Wat Saket wore their robes were, to me, signs of his compassion and his gentle way of protecting the old tradi-

tions and customs that could easily be lost in the momentum of political issues and the rapidly changing pressures on the Thai Sangha and Thai society.

In 1977 I went to live in England at the invitation of the English Sangha Trust in London. The Chairman, George Sharp, had already visited and consulted with Luang Por Chah regarding the need for and interest in Buddhism in England. Luang Por Chah and I went to Wat Saket to inform Somdet Buddhajahn and we received his blessings. During the many years that I lived in England, I would always consult with and inform Somdet Buddhajahn of the developments in and challenges to the life of the Sangha in Europe. I considered taking a very conservative tradition of Buddhist monasticism and meditation practice to a very modern, non-Buddhist and affluent European country as an experiment, and I was determined to live within the established structure of the *Vinaya* (monastic discipline) as I had been trained by Luang Por Chah.

When I was given permission to perform the duties of a preceptor (*Upajjhāya*) in the United Kingdom from the Mahathera Samakorn (the Council of Sangha Elders), at the request of Somdet Buddhajahn, he advised me to respect and abide within the limits and admonitions of Luang Por Chah and the Sangha at Wat Nong Pah Pong.

He acted as a counsellor and adviser to me and was always available whenever I had any problems, difficulties or doubts about events or situations that arose while living in England.

In 1982 Luang Por Chah had a very serious stroke which made it impossible for him to speak. His disciples from many branch monasteries, both in and outside Thailand, gathered around him to support and look after his needs. Luang Por Chah had already designated Tan Ajahn Liem to take on the duties of being the Head Monk at Wat Nong Pah Pong. Everything was done to help and care for Luang Por Chah during this time.

Somdet Buddhajahn decided to take on the duties within the Mahathera Samakorn as the Head of the region of Thailand that included Ubon Rajathani. He told me that he was doing this in order to support and protect Luang Por Chah and his monasteries during this time of crisis. Because



Luang Por Sumedho and other Western Sangha members join Somdet Buddhajahn at Wat Saket, Bangkok, for the *Uposatha* ceremony and *Pātimokkha* recitation.

of this caring and generous act, our Sangha has felt a close bond and strong sense of gratitude to Somdet Buddhajahn.

Luang Por Chah lived for ten more years. I would return to Thailand every year to pay my respects and inform him of my life in England and its ups and downs, and to express my overwhelming gratitude for being his disciple and for his wise guidance and training during the early years of my monastic life. At this time I would also visit the Somdet at Wat Saket. If it was an *Uposatha* day, I would ask to attend the *Pātimokkha* recitation at Wat Saket. Somdet Buddhajahn always received me with much warmth. I felt that he was not just a high-ranking Sangha superior, but also a true friend.

In 1992 the Royal Cremation of Phra Bodhinyāna Thera (Luang Por Chah) took place at Wat Nong Pah Pong. I had received the royal title of Phra Sumedhajahn at the request of Somdet Buddhajahn. This was the first time that a foreign monk had received this honour of a royal title. I am sure that this was given in order to honour Luang Por Chah. The King and Queen of Thailand sponsored and attended this memorable event. I recall the moment when I found myself standing in a separate pavilion with the Sangharaja (Somdet Nyanasangworn), Somdet Buddhajahn, Tan Chao Khun Paññananda of Wat Cholpratan, Tan Chao Khun Dhammapariyatimuni (my *Upajjhāya*), Luang Por Jun (Luang Por Chah's most senior disciple), Tan Chao Khun Mongolkittitada (Ajahn Maha Amorn, also a senior disciple of Luang Por Chah), Phra Thepkittimuni (the Head Monk of the Ubon Rajathani Province) and Tan Ajahn Liem (the Head Monk of Wat Nong Pah Pong). I remember vividly the rapture I felt at this moment of recognition – to be in a place with almost all the monks who had been a great influence and support during my life as a bhikkhu. I call it 'a peak moment': all of us there together in order to respect and honour a truly great teacher, a sage and an exemplary bhikkhu. Plus, the congregation of so many important people and Buddhists being together at one place in time to celebrate and affirm the goodness, the wisdom and the life and death of Luang Por Chah.

*Sabbe saṅkhāra anicca
Sabbe Dhamma anattā*

The Buddha's essential teaching is the continuous reflection on Reality.

'All conditions are impermanent.
All Dhammas are not-self.'

With the passing of Somdet Buddhajahn, I chant these verses and reflect on the reality that when someone we know dies, what is left to us is the memory. This article is my memory of Somdet Buddhajahn. With this memory arises a feeling of gratitude and joy, aligned with the natural pathos that underlies the memory of someone we have loved and admired who has died. This memory, like all conditions, is impermanent. It comes and goes. But it is a memory that leads me onwards toward the Reality of Dhamma, to the joy of Dhamma, and to gratitude for having known Somdet Buddhajahn in this lifetime. ☸

GLOSSARY

Some of the Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of *Forest Sangha Newsletter* are included here. Please note that these are brief descriptions of how these words are being used in this 2014 issue; they are not full definitions.

Ajahn (Thai): senior monk or nun; literally 'teacher'; used for those with ten vassas or more.

anagārika/ā: male or female postulant.

anattā: not-self, ownerless.

arahant: a 'worthy one' or 'pure one'; a person whose mind is free of defilements and who is thus not destined for further rebirth.

avijjā: unawareness; ignorance; obscured awareness; delusion about the nature of the mind.

bhava: becoming; states of being that develop first in the mind and can then be experienced as internal worlds and/or as worlds on an external level.

bhikkhu: a Buddhist monk.

dāna: giving, liberality; offering, alms.

Dhamma: the Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.

dhamma: phenomena in and of itself; mental quality.

dukkha: unsatisfactoriness; stress; suffering; distress; discontent.

khanda: heap; group; aggregate; physical and mental components of sensory experience in general.

kusala: wholesome, skilful, good, meritorious.

Luang Por (Thai): a title of affectionate respect (lit. 'Venerable Father').

Maha Thera: an honorific term for fully ordained Buddhist monks in the Buddhist monastic order (the term Therī is used for nuns).

Mahanikaya: refers to one of the two principal sects of modern Thai Buddhism.

pabbajjā: 'Going Forth (from home to the homeless life)'; become a sāmaṇera or sāmaṇerī (or novice monk or nun).

Pātimokkha: the basic code of monastic discipline.

pūjā: devotional observances such as chanting and offering incense.

samādhi: concentration; the practice of centring the mind.

saṅghakamma: formal monastic acts.

Sangharaja: (lit. 'Sangha ruler') a title given in many Theravāda Buddhist countries to a senior monk who is the titular head either of a monastic fraternity (*nikāya*), or of the Sangha throughout the country; 'Supreme Patriarch'.

saṅkhara: formation, compound, fashioning; can refer to anything formed or fashioned by conditions; thought-formations within the mind.

siladharā: a Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.

sīmā: a boundary or territory within which the monastic Sangha's formal acts must be performed in order to be valid.

Somdet: a title given to the highest officials in the Thai Sangha.

stūpa (Sanskrit): a dome-shaped mound or monument.

Tan (Thai): venerable; a title of respect used for Buddhist monks.

tudong (Thai): travelling from place to place, most commonly seeking quietude and staying in the wilderness.

Uposatha: 'Observance Day'; a day corresponding to the phases of the moon on which Buddhist laypeople gather to reaffirm their precepts; on new moon and full moon uposatha days monks and nuns assemble to recite the *Pātimokkha*.

upsampadā: acceptance; entry into the Sangha as a bhikkhu or bhikkhūñī.

vihāra: a monastic dwelling.

vinaya: the monastic discipline.

Changing Our Climate for the Better – by Ajahn Sucitto

When people are inflamed with reckless passion, overwhelmed by corrupt ambitions, entranced by wrong ideas, rainfall decreases. Food is hard to come by. The crops fail, are mildewed and stunted. Because of this many people perish.

The Buddha (A. 3: 56)

IT SEEMS IMPORTANT TO BRING THE SUBJECT OF THE ENVIRONMENT INTO A FOCUS FOR DHAMMA PRACTICE. I'D LIKE TO PRESENT A POSITIVE RESPONSE to the interrelated topics

of climate change, mass species extinction, runaway overpopulation, over-production and pollution – but positive news is hard to find. Yes, I do occasionally get a free newspaper called *Positive News*, but even on its pages a recent item of 'good' news was that the rate of destruction of the Amazon rainforest had dropped by 20% last year. It's small encouragement to learn that instead of poisoning, defoliating and desecrating our planet and source of livelihood at 100 mph, the effect of Kyoto and Copenhagen and Rio Earth Summits, and so on, has been to slow it down to 80 mph. But perhaps it's naïve of me to dream of not destroying our source of oxygen and carbon management at all.

I expect you've read about the melting of the polar ice-caps and the predicted flooding of coastal areas; or that the amount of rainforest cut down every year is equivalent to the size of Belgium; or that the mining of the Alberta Tar Sands creates opencast mines the size of England and Wales that seep their poisons into the local watershed; or that there is a zone in the Pacific the size of Texas (at last reckoning) that is a vast swirl of waste plastic. I wonder what you do with that information. Maybe rather than buy a plastic bottle of water, then throw the empty bottle 'away', you consider how that plastic contaminates the sea, and finds its way up the food-chain, from small to large fish and so on up to human consumption – and decide not to buy it. I hope you do that rather than recycle it, because extracting, and refining, the oil from which plastic is derived and then recycling the plastic still uses up energy; also, three litres of water are used to obtain one litre of the bottled stuff. I hope you also consider abstaining from eating fish, as the oceans have lost 90% of their fish stock since the 1940s and there might not be that many left soon. Perhaps like me, you might have wondered: 'Is there any way of stopping this?' I hope you will have avoided sinking into depression; and also of adopting the



philosophical shrug: 'Well, all things are impermanent, and we all have to die.' But, having been through all this and more, I've come out of dead statistics and into a life based on kamma and ethics. Whatever the results in the external world, whether it is impermanent or not, through the teachings on kamma the Buddha encourages us to understand the

causes and results of our actions and act responsibly; and, furthermore, to urge others to do so. So rather than to resound gloom and despair, this is a good way to live.

The basis of Dhamma teaching is right view, the acknowledgement of cause and effect; and the basis of Dhamma-practice

is heedfulness, *appamāda*, paying attention. So a Dhamma practitioner uses resources wisely; he or she reflects that every material thing comes from the earth, not the shop; furthermore, that everything thrown away goes back to the earth – the source of food, air and water. In addition, he or she uplifts and exercises good kamma, the basis for happiness in this life and the foundation for awakening. This centres around three timeless principles: generosity/sharing; morality/integrity; and renunciation/living simply. They're interconnected: we can share when we trust each other, and trust is established when we live morally. Moreover, the qualities of friendship and contentment that come from living morally and sharing lessen the sense-appetites: hence living more simply. Taken together, these three factors leads to one's welfare, the welfare of others and to nibbāna.¹

Monasteries (Buddhist or Christian) exemplify this. Depending on the size of the community, you're likely to see, two washing machines for fifty adults, not twenty, and often they've been given by someone who was inspired by the monastic example. (Monks at Cittaviveka routinely wash their own requisites by hand and leave the machine for the communal and guest linen). You might see large solid buildings, but take note that these are for communal and public use, especially at a centre like Amaravati that is used by thousands of people every month. Vehicles? One work

¹ As the Buddha pointed out at M.19.

wagon and one car in a large monastery serving up to thirty people; both of these at Cittaviveka are over fifteen years old and kept going through diligent maintenance and care. We were given a minibus, but keep that for the Sangha in the UK as a communal means of ferrying large numbers around. And so on. There's room for improvement, but we're paying attention and eager to lessen our consumer footprint. But we represent only a small part of the population.

The place of the Sangha has always been to live close to the earth and at the margins of the society where their

example may be witnessed. At Cittaviveka we've planted many thousands of trees, installed a large solar panel, use a renewable wood source for heating and are investigating the feasibility of using Hammer Stream as a means of generating hydroelectricity. Most forest monasteries from New Zealand and Australia through to California are acting in similar ways. A major theme behind the Amaravati Development Project is to conserve energy by building better-insulated buildings (see article on page 32). And if you're looking for ideas on what you might do, or at least bear in mind, then Ajahn Sona's presentation on YouTube: 'Energy Efficiency at Birken Forest Monastery' is a useful source.

Conservation isn't a classical concern – although a standard of frugality is – but as far as the environment goes, things have changed since the Buddha's time. The early Buddhist attitude towards Nature was that the forests offered the monks and nuns a suitable place to withdraw to for Dhamma-practice. Secluded from the turmoil and gloss of the social world, these remote places were ideal settings within which to come to terms with life, death and Nature. At that time, species extinction and deforestation were not issues. Pollution only occurred in terms of mind. So the attitude of non-violence was both out of empathy for animals and as a guard against bad kamma of violating life; that was Buddhist ecology.

That attitude remained the case until after the Second World War. But in the 1950s the population of the planet, less than half what it is today, began to grow rapidly. And as it did so, the forests of SE Asia came crashing down, with Thailand alone losing half of its natural forest after the Second World War. So monks like Ajahn Buddhadasa began speaking up for Nature:

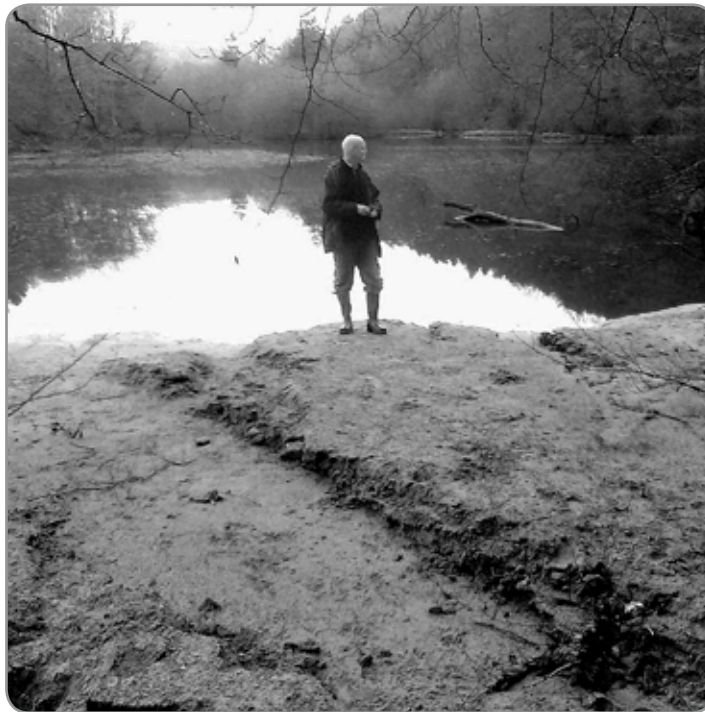
The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees, and the Earth. When we realize that

the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise – then we can build a noble environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we shall perish.

Since then, environmental concern has risen, and there is an ongoing lineage of 'ecology monks' in Thailand who work to preserve forests and encourage conservation.

Of course, the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, exiled and living in the West, was also vociferous. He had every right to be. During the Vietnam War, tons of 'Agent Orange' (a defoliant that contained an estimated total of

130 pounds of dioxin) were dumped on his country in order to destroy forest cover and therefore expose the Viet Cong. However, there were dire consequences in terms of loss of animal life and human birth defects that continue to this day. (After all, three ounces of dioxin in the water supply of New York City would be enough to wipe out the city's population.) And on returning to the US, the GIs brought the toxins with them in their bodies. I don't know much about geopolitics and defending democracy – but if you want to understand interconnect-



edness and cause and effect, look no further. Come to think of it, didn't Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring*, way back in 1962, write about the danger of spraying the earth with toxic chemicals? Yet it's still going on. Someone isn't paying attention.

Those who do pay attention and use wise consideration note that Nature is a closed system: there is no 'away' where you can dump stuff, and there's no other resource for our lives. You're alive as a guest of the planet: so please keep the place clean and leave it in a state in which your children can use it. If you destroy wildlife you damage the system that, through producing oxygen and feeding on itself, manages the ecosystem of the entire planet, for free: all it requires of us is that we allow it to do so. This is hardly an esoteric Buddhist teaching. However, as the teachings on kamma point out, we reap the results of our actions both in terms of the mind-set that instigates them, and the body that inherits the physical results. When the motivation is aversion, to get rid of the enemy, the pests, etc., we will surely poison and destroy ourselves.

The kammic consequences of action based on greed are as devastating as those based on war and conflict. Greed is the urge to take more than one needs; an urge that, rather than quelling desire, propagates and increases it. And since

the planet is the fundamental source of all material things, as long as humans don't tackle greed, the Earth has to pay the price. We could debate over what the average person needs, but the monastic standard of food, clothes, shelter and medicine is a good place to start. Monks and nuns with typical human bodies can get by on that. You might add heating, lighting and a means of transport to that list, but bear in mind that all these basic requisites, not to mention drinkable water and clean air, have to be produced by the Earth. So any need that requires damaging the resource of fertile land, clean water and air is a dangerous one, and should be reduced. However, the norm in industrialized societies is to distract our attention, not to consider the mining and the spraying, and the oil use that supports transport and imports, and plastic everything (plastic comes from oil, right?). Instead we are encouraged to use the resources of the planet to produce gadgets, luxuries and entertainments to compensate for the debilitating effect that the pressure and complexities of modern life have on the human spirit. And above all, the political message is that this will keep the economy growing, and this is a good thing for all of us.

However, the way that the economy is growing is by converting planetary (and human) resources into money. For instance, the food industry is about making money, not about feeding people. A large amount (estimated 30%-50%) of the food that is produced from the Earth is thrown away.² Either the vegetables look too lumpy or the apples too speckled for the market, or the stuff passes its sell-by date and is dumped, or it gets cooked in a restaurant and the diner doesn't eat it all. But it has produced money. Probably the most extravagant is the meat industry. According to UN-backed statistics, meat production takes up about 70% of arable land and causes 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Yet forests are cleared to create pasture for cattle; and even when land is cultivated for vegetables, some 97% of the planet's soya beans and 35% of corn produced in the US are used to feed livestock (and 40% of US corn gets converted into ethanol to fuel cars). Also, as cattle wouldn't naturally survive on land like the Prairies, rearing them means depleting the water table – according to the UN something like 1,500 gallons of water are used to produce one pound of meat. Then of course, native species that might use the land or prey on the cattle have to be killed. Why should the meat and dairy industry have such rights to use the fertile Earth, in order to make money? (Incidentally, an EU Commission report last year found that switching to a vegan diet would result in twice the carbon emissions savings of switching to an elec-



tric car, and lessen the suffering of more than a billion farm animals each year in the UK alone.)

You could also examine forestry, fishing and mining in such a way; but the statistics become overwhelming. Moreover, the problem is more widespread: all our overproduction happens because of the need to make money. Healing, teaching, housing, transport, dying – everything costs money. And if money is the dominant factor, then we're governed by something that has no limits to its appetite, and that can consume just about anything and still want more. Its ap-

petite is called 'the economy' and seen as the item that must always grow and whose welfare is of paramount importance: a major reason for the USA's not signing the Kyoto Protocol on Carbon Emissions was that it would 'damage the economy'. The economy moves the money around, but its trend is to move much of it one way – into credit to be controlled by a minority and away from the people who have to exist in debt. Even when it is fed and fretted over, periodically the economy still sickens and crashes; so loans are arranged and austerity measures such as lower welfare, zero rate employment and higher taxes imposed. For the welfare of the economy, human society gets divided into those who have

too much and those who don't have enough; the disadvantaged grow angry, and then fists are waved and bottles and tear gas start flying around. I'm only a Buddhist monk, so what do I know about economics? But I ask: 'What do we want – a planet that we can live on or an economy that exhausts us as well as the Earth?'

Put even more simply, greed kills as surely as hatred.

Now, there would barely be much point in writing all this if there wasn't any solution. The Buddha's instruction and our ongoing Dhamma-practice, are to put an end to greed and hatred. And clearing away delusion is a big part of that: to understand the causes and conditions that prevent us from seeing and tackling our appetites and aversions. Now, I'm sure that no one intends to damage our precious Earth, but as a species we're under the confused impression that Nature will cope with our privations or recover from our abuse. As is becoming more apparent, this is a deep delusion. But the heart of the delusion isn't any particular

² See *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at Our World* by HRH The Prince of Wales (HarperCollins, 2010); also a report by the Institution for Mechanical Engineers – *Global Food; Waste Not, Want Not*.

people, but the wrong view of the political and economic systems. The political viewpoint of being separate nations pits nation against nation, and ideology against ideology; so we lose touch with our empathy for other humans. And an economy that's bent on converting everything – and everyone – into a marketable item needs to be wisely moderated by restraint and compassion. This may sound hopelessly idealistic. But political will is only aroused by a sea-change in our attitudes. For instance, a major argument against the abolition of slavery was that such a measure would ruin the economy. Well, after a while the moral conscience of human beings found that to be an inadequate argument; and when that moral conscience translated into political resolve, slavery was abolished.

And the economy rolled on as before. So a viable economy will survive as long as there are humans; it just needs to be governed by wisdom. The view that we have to shift from was elucidated by the eminent Thai scholar monk, Ven. Payutto, in his address to the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago.³ He outlined three false perceptions from which our social and environmental problems stem:

- The perception that humankind is separate from nature, and that it must control, conquer or manipulate nature according to human desires.
- The perception that fellow humans are not our fellows; the tendency to focus on the differences between us rather than the common ground.
- The perception that happiness is dependent on gaining and keeping an abundance of material possessions.

And what we have to shift to, through international agreements and networks, is a way of operating that is based on empathy for the world as a whole. After all, one of our regular chants is 'I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a heart imbued with compassion ...' and my suggestion is merely that we back up that attitude with some clear thinking, such as: ethical consumption is an aspect of right livelihood. Remember: what you buy supports that industry. Do you want to support the meat industry? Do you want to support the ongoing use of plastic? Where do you think the plastic came from? And where will it go? What about adopting 'reduce (consumption), repair and recycle' as a practice? Because however energy is expended – whether through electricity, Internet use, transport or heating – we are drawing from a finite resource. It could be healthier to share a ride or cycle to work. And for further advice, why not take a look at One Earth Sangha (www.oneearthsangha.org) or www.350.org? Wisdom is an action, an individual practice based on sharing, generosity and integrity. We need to bring it to bear on how we live in accordance with the Earth's resources.

The systemic nature of the problem may make it seem

³ Published as: *A Buddhist Solution for the Twenty-first Century* (trans. Bruce Evans). Ven. Payutto is a Chao Khun in the Thai Sangha; his current title is 'Phra Dhammapitaka'.

that a solution is beyond the reach of any individual, and yet ... I reflect on individuals like Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan woman who won the Nobel Prize in 2004 for setting up the organization to combat deforestation and promote women's rights. In her country, women have traditionally had little effective power over the body politic. However, by the time she passed away in 2011, Wangari had established the Green Belt Movement, which enabled poor women to plant thirty million trees.

Our wise reflection must also bring to mind the example of the Buddha. Completely alone in a world on fire with greed, hatred and delusion, he decided to teach. Thank goodness he didn't just shrug and go back to the root of a tree! Now as inheritors of his Dhamma, we are advantaged by the precise, pragmatic and progressively uplifting nature of his practice-path. Our lives can be for the welfare of the world; we just need to keep reframing how. Of course, who knows how much we can save of this Earth and our humanity? But we can try; and even that is good kamma: careful consideration and wise action is not beyond any of us in the here and now. ☸

Once you see what it is all about, you really want to be very, very careful about what you do and say. You can have no intention to live life at the expense of any other creature. One does not feel that one's life is so much more important than anyone else's. One begins to feel the freedom and the lightness in that harmony with nature rather than the heaviness of exploitation of nature for personal gain.

Ajahn Sumedho

Ordinary Things

(Version on a theme of Adam Zagajewski)

Ordinary things are just as deep as our nightmares and visions, they do not hide their invitations. Remember the Chinese master who settled for peace after a long night of rain pattering his bamboo roof. Sometimes in the evening when both light and shadow are busy shuffling mysteries we forget ourselves in a lucid gentle way and there remain only happiness and sorrow and the purity that can't be seen.

Bhikkhu Abhinando

Skilful Desires

Adapted from a Dhamma talk offered by Ajahn Jayasāro
at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery on 5 December 2012

AS I REMEMBER, THE MAJORITY OF THE TEACHINGS THAT AJAHN CHAH GAVE WERE NOT PARTICULARLY OR STARTLINGLY PROFOUND. They didn't consist of things that you'd never heard of before, where you would say, 'Wow – esoteric Buddhist teachings in the forest! If I hadn't come here I would never have had the opportunity for this kind of initiation, or this kind of unheard revelation of the Dhamma.' Instead, it was more that every single word he said struck home. It was as if we were hearing those teachings for the first time, but at the same time it wasn't new information which needed a whole extensive vocabulary. Often he was able to express himself in very simple terms, which we could either understand for ourselves or with the help of a friend who would translate for us. But these words struck home, and they struck home because of the relationship, the feeling that we had, the devotion, the faith in him that we felt. So he was able to create a situation in which learning took place.

Through his own example and his personal presence and power, we felt this great sense of *chanda* in practice. I don't know how many people are familiar with this word, but it's a vital word to understand. Western presentations of Buddhist teachings have often led to the understanding that suffering arises because of desire, and therefore you shouldn't desire anything. Whereas in fact the Buddha spoke of two kinds of desire: desire that arises from ignorance and delusion which is called *taṇhā* – craving – and desire that arises from wisdom and intelligence, which is called *kusala-chanda*, or *dhamma-chanda*, or most simply *chanda*. *Chanda* doesn't mean this exclusively, but in this particular case I'm using *chanda* to mean wise and intelligent desire and motivation, and the Buddha stressed that this is absolutely fundamental to any progress on the Eightfold Path.

In the four *Iddhipādas*, the Four Paths to Power, *chanda* is the first. In the presence of *chanda*, *virīya*, effort, arises. Effort is in many ways the characteristic *dhamma*¹ of this whole school of Buddhism. In fact, the Buddha referred to his teachings not as Theravāda but as *virīyavāda*. It is a teaching of effort, a teaching that there is such a thing as effort, that effort can be put forth, effort should be put forth, and that effort is what is needed for progress on the Path.

¹ *dhamma(s)*: phenomenon/a; mental objects; quality.

When we lived with Ajahn Chah at Wat Pah Pong, he was able to create around him, within the hearts of his students, this sense of *chanda*. One way that we can talk about *chanda* is by distinguishing it from the unwholesome kind of desire which is *taṇhā*. One of the most observable differences is that *taṇhā* is focused on the result of an action, while *chanda* is focused on the action itself. So *taṇhā* wants to get, wants to be, wants to become, wants to get rid of, wants to be separated from something. *Chanda* wants 'to do'. As I recall, in those days after

evening chanting Ajahn Chah would often say, 'Now is the time to go back to your *kuṭis* and put forth effort.' He didn't say, 'Go back and meditate.' So our practice was conceived in terms of effort and it was the putting forth of effort which was important, and the willingness and interest to do that came through *chanda*.

I've very rarely taught meditation in the West, but in Thailand the common problem with lay meditators is that they look on meditation practice as work which you perform in order to get a reward that is called 'peace'; so you meditate in order to become peaceful. When people meditate and they don't become peaceful, or they don't achieve the kind of peace which they imagined they should be achieving, they become frustrated and discouraged,

and even despair of meditation altogether or assume that they don't have the spiritual faculties necessary to be able to benefit from meditation. In many ways we can say that following the Path is the fruit, and this is something that I find myself talking about a lot. To make a comparison, let's say a small child is learning to walk. If you were to say, 'Well, where did the child walk to today? How far did he or she get?', that's not the point. The child wasn't standing up, walking a few steps, falling down and getting up in order to get somewhere. It didn't fail because it didn't get to a particular place. Similarly, if you're learning to ride a bicycle, it's not important where exactly you ride to. The question is, can you balance on a bicycle? Can you control a bicycle? Can you ride a bicycle? The goal is not riding to a particular destination.

I suggest that we look at meditation practice in the same way. We say, 'Why are we putting forth this effort?' Well, in order to be someone who knows how to put forth effort all the time in an appropriate way; someone who is able to put forth



effort consistently, whatever the surrounding conditions are, whatever the obstacles might be. This ability to put forth unremitting effort is the goal itself. That's not to say that there's no interest in *samādhi*. But *samādhi* will come of itself. It's a natural consequence of this precise, devoted, consistent, wise effort.

In working life, some people will consider work as a drudge and a miserable imposition that you have to grit your teeth and get through so that you win the reward of a monthly or weekly wage. This can lead to a lot of unhappiness at work, and can easily be a cause of sloppiness and even corruption and dishonesty if work is looked upon as merely a means to an end. And if you can find an easier means to the same end, then why not? But if the focus is turned towards the work itself, and not towards waiting for some pleasure or happiness which will arise in the future as a result of the work – finding joy,

interest in the work for its own sake – that is not to say that you won't get your wage; you get your reward afterwards anyway. It just doesn't have to be constantly on your mind. This can be an attitude towards meditation too. So it's not, 'Oh, I've been meditating for so long and I still haven't got this and haven't reached and realized that ...' The question is, are you someone who can put forth effort consistently? Can you find joy and interest in putting forth effort?

For children, whether they like something or don't like it is a kind of moral imperative. You say, 'You do this.' 'No!' 'Why not?' 'I don't like it!' 'Why are you doing this?' 'Because I like it.' This is the rationale of the child: 'I will do it, I want to do it because I like it,' and: 'I won't do it' or 'I shouldn't have to do it because I don't like it.' But although we can garnish and camouflage it a bit as we get older, it's often the rationale of the adult as well. We have things that we like and we find reasons to explain why we like them, while not really being honest enough to recognize that usually the sense of like or dislike comes first and the reasons come afterwards. The very simple observation is that some things we really like are to our detriment in the long term; they can be harmful to us and others. Similarly, some things that we dislike can in the long term be for our benefit and happiness. Therefore we can't assume that our sense of like and dislike is an adequate or reliable indication of whether or not we should spend time doing something, or associating with people or things.

So what we're learning from meditation is the ability to stop and look, and not be carried away by or give undue importance to these fleeting feelings of liking and disliking; we're learning to put forth effort. And in Ajahn Chah's words, 'When you feel diligent and enthusiastic you meditate, and when you feel lazy you meditate.' You're recognizing those feelings, but you're not allowing them to condition your effort.

As I mentioned, the ability to put forth effort depends a great deal on *chanda*. When you start any meditation period, it's important to recognize that *chanda* is not always there. Even with monks and nuns, people who are giving their lives

to this practice, the sense of *chanda* fluctuates. If you lack that sense of interest and *chanda*, and uplift and enthusiasm for practice, the meditation can very quickly grind to a halt or run into quicksand; you have serious problems. That's why I think it's worth just checking the amount of interest at the beginning of a meditation, and if it's lacking, being willing to spend some time cultivating it, bringing it up. The more you apply yourself to doing this, the more fluent you will be and the more easily you can do it, until it becomes almost automatic.

One of the simplest ways of doing this is to use our thinking mind to reflect on two subjects. The first is the suffering and drawbacks inherent in the lack of mindfulness, inner peace and wisdom. We can draw upon particular areas or events in our lives which have quite clearly caused great distress to ourselves and others, and can see very plainly their results, such as

... the Buddha spoke of two kinds of desire: desire that arises from ignorance and delusion, which is called *taṇhā*, and desire that arises from wisdom and intelligence ... *chanda*.

a lack of inner awareness, lack of mindfulness, lack of inner discipline and inner *Vinaya*. We can also draw upon the experiences of the people we know and how they have particularly affected us. The second way of using the thinking mind is to reflect upon all the blessings of mindfulness, inner peace, wisdom and compassion. Perhaps we can bring up cases of great monks, nuns, and teachers to whom we look up, and how much we revere their peace, calm, kindness, compassion and wisdom. We can remind ourselves that they

are not the owners of these qualities, that they weren't born with these qualities; that these qualities manifested in them through effort, and that great teachers are vessels for beautiful, noble qualities. And just as they are vessels, so we too can be vessels: men and women, from both Western and Eastern countries. Birth as a human being means that we have within us the capacity to manifest every noble quality, and that we should try to do so.

There are many different ways of reflecting on the disadvantages and suffering inherent in a lack of mental training and development. Similarly, we can reflect on the advantages and blessings of mental training and development. As you do this more and more, and become more fluent, the process can become very rapid. But the point is that we are recognizing that the groundwork, the preparing of the mind in order to give it sufficient integrity and maturity to make use of meditation techniques, is dependent on this quality of *chanda*. If we overlook that or just go straight into the meditation practices when our minds lack the readiness to do so, the result can be frustrating and can lead to a lack of progress on the Path.

Ajahn Chah was someone who gave us this *chanda* for free. But at the same time, unlike some teachers, he took no pleasure in his disciples' devotion. He never indulged in it. Indeed, if he saw that any monk was becoming overly devoted to him individually – becoming attached to him, in other words – often he would just send him off somewhere hundreds of miles away for a year or so to get over it. And so we had this feeling that he always had our best interests at heart, but it

wouldn't always be very comfortable for us. He wasn't someone who just wanted to keep his closest disciples around him and bask in that sense of being loved and respected; not at all. But one important characteristic of the way he taught was that he would bring things back again and again to the Four Noble Truths, not as philosophy but as personal experience. Although we can accept the idea – the value of going against the grain, going against the stream – in practice very few people are able to do that on a consistent basis without becoming overly ascetic and serious, and somewhat twisted. Or else they put forth a lot of effort for a short period, and then just let it all go and feel guilty. Then they go to the opposite extreme again and are super-strict for a while, but are unable to sustain it.

The inability just to go steadily against the stream of *taṇhā*, particularly at the beginning of practice, is a formidable obstacle, but one which has to be surpassed or surmounted. So Ajahn Chah set up his monastery and life there in such a way that there was this constant rubbing against your likes and dislikes, and just a sufficient amount of discomfort to compel you to look and see where the suffering was coming from. He would famously tell us that as a monk you can cut out a lot of distractions, but you can't cut out *all* distractions. This means that you simplify everything, and you're able to watch the mind a lot more easily.

But three areas which monks can still indulge in are sleep, food and conversation: you have to keep a watch on these. He said, 'Don't eat a lot, don't sleep a lot, don't talk a lot', because eating, speaking and sleeping are the dangers for indulgence in monastic life. He wouldn't let you have the chance to sleep, eat or talk as much as you wanted, simply so that you could see the craving for that kind of indulgence and release. This is not a sadistic practice, but one in which you have to be able to say, 'Yes, I'm suffering. Why? Because of craving; because I want something, or I want something I'm not getting, or I'm getting something I'm not wanting.' This is the value of coming to monasteries and being with monastics, and having groups of friends who give energy to each other and act as *kalyāṇa mitta*, as wise friends. We had this sense of going against the grain, just a little bit; not so much that it felt heroic or unsustainable, but just going outside our comfort zones a wee bit. And it's in such situations that some real progress can take place.

If you look on meditation as confined to a particular posture, it can be very frustrating. So what is our practice today? Well, our practice in any day, whether we're alone, with family or at work – whatever we're doing, wherever we are – is to take care of the mind and protect it as best we can. This is why I recommend seeing practice in terms of what the Buddha called the Four Right Efforts. Firstly, we practise to prevent the arising of unwholesome *dhammas* that have not yet arisen. Our second area of work is to make the effort to deal with unwholesome *dhammas* that have arisen by skilfully and constructively reducing and eliminating them. The third area of work is seeking ways of instilling and manifesting whole-

some *dhammas* that have not yet arisen in our hearts. Lastly, with those wholesome *dhammas* that have arisen, we don't take them for granted, but seek to develop them as much as is possible. The Buddha said that prior to his enlightenment, the two virtues that he depended on more than any others were unremitting, constant effort, along with a lack of contentment with the wholesome qualities that he'd already developed.

Meditators need to be contented with material supports and discontented with the spiritual virtues and accomplishments they have already attained. In daily life this is something that can be applied anywhere. For instance, you have to go to a meeting or you have a particular task to perform, and you ask yourself what are the kinds of unwholesome *dhammas* that tend to arise: 'When I meet that person I always get so irritated, he's so selfish or so conceited.' This is your meditation.

... our practice in any day, whether we're alone, with family or at work ... is to take care of the mind and protect it as best we can.

Your practice that day is, 'How can I spend an hour with that person without getting irritated with him, feeling averse to him or contemptuous of him?' But in the case where you do lose your temper or get upset with somebody, you ask, 'What strategies do I have, what practical means have I developed or should be developing to deal with that?'

And in a particular situation that I'm going to find myself in today – with my family, friends, colleagues at work – what are the wholesome *dhammas*, the particular kinds of virtues that I can be working on: right speech, patience, kindness, compassion? Where should I be applying those qualities? How should I be applying them? And those qualities that I have developed, how can I take care of them, nurture them and lead them even further onwards?'

These aspects of Dhamma mentioned above give a very wide and comprehensive grounding and structure for practice. Formal meditation techniques are essential in that they are a concentrated form, one in which you temporarily put aside all distractions, and they give a power and an uplift to the mind which will enable the application of the Four Right Efforts in daily life to be successful. But at the same time, the more you put effort into these four areas in daily life, the more you'll enjoy and benefit from meditation. Thus you are finding ways of fine-tuning your motivation so that it's in the practice itself – the excellence of the practice itself – where you begin to trust that the results of that right, wise effort will manifest as a natural consequence. ☸

Ajahn Jayasāro received the Admission into the Bhikkhu Sangha in 1980 with Venerable Ajahn Chah as his preceptor. Ajahn Jayasāro's entire life as a monk has been based in Thailand, and from 1997 until 2002 he was the abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat. He is currently living alone in a hermitage at the foot of the Kow Yai mountains in central Thailand.

Kindness

A Dhamma reflection adapted from a talk given in 2010
by Ajahn Abhinando at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery

KINDNESS IS NOURISHING FOR ALL OF US. HOW DO WE FEEL WHEN WE ARE MET WITH KINDNESS OR EXPERIENCE IT IN OURSELVES? HOW DO WE FEEL when we perceive it as absent? The difference should make it clear that we benefit from paying attention to kindness, and from trying to cultivate our ability to be kind. In fact, the unobstructed heart is said to have kindness as its natural foundation. So whenever we check and notice that this quality is missing, we can take this as an indicator that our heart is obstructed.

Probably you are aware of the traditional form of *mettā* meditation, in which you recite a standard phrase to yourself. There will be some variations in the phrases used. The ones I use are: 'May I be well, may I be peaceful, may I be happy.' In this case the well-wishing is directed to oneself. The traditional way in which kindness meditation is still taught nowadays by most teachers in Asia is to start with oneself, the underlying assumption being that this is actually the easiest way to start; that it is natural for all of us to like ourselves and wish ourselves well. To some Westerners this might seem counter-intuitive. For many of us it is the exact opposite: it is hardest to offer kindness and well-wishing to ourselves. Suffering caused by low self-esteem and a hypercritical mind is endemic in our culture, and that trend has started to spread into traditional Buddhist cultures in Asia as well.

With this in mind, we tend to start by bringing up the memory of someone towards whom we feel naturally kind, perhaps someone who has helped us in important ways, so that we naturally feel grateful to that person. The idea is to hold the image of the person you remember in your mind and see how this affects you. What happens when you bring up this memory? Do you feel a response to it? Where do you feel that response? Can you actually feel something in the body? Feelings like kindness are mainly located in the chest, literally in the area of the physical heart. Then wish that person well, saying silently in your mind, in your heart: 'May you be well, may you be peaceful, may you be happy.' Then keep centring your attention in the body, in the chest area; notice whether you feel something there in response – a resonance, some warmth perhaps, or pressure or tenderness, anything. It doesn't matter whether the feeling is strong or very subtle; bring your attention to it, as if you were massaging that area with your attention; try to increase it.

This practice is a tool. Just like other tools it doesn't always work, and it works differently for different people. So if this tool doesn't work for you, don't worry about it. But if you would like to try it out and cultivate it, even if you don't feel anything to begin with, never mind. When you bring up the memory of someone or something, you can repeat a well-wishing thought to yourself, and if that is really what you feel



or would like to feel about that person, it is authentic enough. Just keep it going. Perhaps sooner or later you will also start to feel it in the body. The important thing is to practise with it for some time, at least a few minutes at a time, to cultivate it consciously. By doing this we can stimulate that particular kind of feeling. So we use this practice to kindle kindness in our heart, to get it going; but then we realize that this kindness is a possibility we always have, a resource to which we can always choose to pay attention. If we remember this and keep using this tool, we can strengthen our resource, in the same way as we cultivate awareness through the practice of continuously bringing attention back to the breath. The more we do that, the stronger grows the capacity just to be aware of something. We can consciously cultivate kindness in the same way, but it is important to recognize that this capacity for kindness is something we already have; it is ours.

We can keep this practice going in our meditation over a period of time, bringing up helpful images, repeating our well-wishing thoughts, and paying attention to and strengthening the experience of kindness in our body and mind. Then we can start to play with the space we have created. This is an attention practice, so we bring attention to the chest. We pick up the sensations of warmth and softness related to our kind intentions, and we merge our attention with those sensations. It is as if we were creating a warm space – a heart space. So we are aware of the fact that our attention is not just attention; it has an affective quality, whether we are aware of it or not, but in this case we pay conscious attention to it and try to cultivate a quality of warmth, of kindness, of welcome.

Once we have a clear impression of the sensations related to kindness in our chest, we can, by moving our attention, try to spread them through our body and see what the effects are. We can even address the body using that phrase of well-wishing, saying: 'May you be well, may you be peaceful,

may you be happy.’ This is particularly something we can use when we feel discomfort or pain, or when dealing with illness. If we pay attention to discomfort or pain in the body and our attention carries a sense of kindness towards the body, this will have an effect on the way we receive our experience. Grounding kindness in the body is also a way of making it more stable and durable, so that we can literally carry kindness around in our body wherever we go; otherwise, the feeling will easily dissolve when it meets some challenge.

After we have established this heart space for a while, we can invite different people into it. We can bring up images of various persons we know. The recommendation is first to bring up people to whom we naturally feel kind – to keep developing the feeling of kindness, making it stronger, creating more and more internal warmth. After a while we can start to invite people about whom we usually feel neutral,

and see what happens. We may then start to realize that this space of kindness can exist quite independently of circumstances. It is ours, so to speak; it doesn’t have to depend on the person we’re thinking about, with whom we’re in contact or to whom we’re relating.

It might be easier to kindle kindness with a person we like or to whom we feel grateful; but once the flame of kindness has been lit, we realize it is actually something we can always choose to keep alive; and there’s an empowerment in that.

If we continue this practice with people about whom we feel neutral, repeating our phrase: ‘May you be well, may you be peaceful, may you be happy’, it might affect the way we feel about them. We might start to see them in a different way. That can be very interesting. Then the real challenge is to bring into our consciousness people we don’t like so much or at all, or with whom we are in conflict; people we find difficult. Again, we see what happens. We don’t demand or expect a particular result, that something really good should be happening or that our view of them should change. It might not. You might just feel the heart space closing down. That’s what usually tends to happen. When it does, we are not supposed just to keep trying harder or to judge ourselves. Rather, we go back to a place where we find this practice easy, perhaps to the person with whom we started. Why? Because we recognize: ‘OK, that space of kindness I have opened up in my heart is not yet strong enough, it is not well enough established, so I need to do a bit more work.’ It’s like if you’re a weight-lifter and you’re trying for a new record, but the weight just doesn’t move. So you say: ‘Oh, all right’, and then go back to the gym and do some more practice; you try some lighter weights first until you become stronger. You can try the record weight again later.

Maybe one day we will succeed in wishing someone we don’t like well. This practice is not about liking where we previously disliked, or pretending to like, but about seeing whether we can develop a capacity of heart, of kindness, that is independent of the experiences and people we encounter. That needs a gradual training of the heart. And a very strong empowerment comes with it. Other people are less capable of influencing our

moods or states of mind, because we develop our own inner resource for feelings of well-being and kindness towards ourselves and others. The same applies to any experience we might dislike and from which we therefore habitually shrink. Our increased capacity for kindness might give us the extra space to allow ourselves to stay more open and be more willing to accept unpleasant feelings. That gives us firm ground on which to stand, from which we can then investigate our experience. It might give us the strength to look at people in different ways, see different aspects of them which may be clouded over or blocked out if we are just reacting to our perception, or feeling that they are being unpleasant and unkind to us.

When there’s a conflict or a disagreement, we often just bounce off each other with our emotional reactions. Mostly we immediately pick up the other person’s emotional state,

This practice is not about liking where we previously disliked, or pretending to like ...

whether they’re afraid, aggressive or judgemental, for example. Often this doesn’t allow us to hear what that person has to say, even if it’s actually quite sensible. Before the argument even enters the rational part of our mind, we react on an emotional level to the other person’s emotional state. If we have to

point out something difficult to someone, it is much easier and often more effective if we can maintain a sense of kindness towards that person. It doesn’t always work, of course; but they are more likely to listen to us if they are able to pick up the fact that we are coming from a place of kindness. That always makes it easier to receive something difficult such as criticism, whereas if we speak with anger or righteousness, even if our arguments are good, the other person is much less likely to listen to them, but instead will react to a feeling of being attacked.

Another very important aspect of this practice is how we relate to ourselves and the conflicts we carry within us. In the Buddhist countries of South East Asia, many meditation teachers advise their disciples to start each meditation session with a few minutes of loving-kindness practice. I find that interesting. It is like tuning the mind before you start to work with it, like musicians giving a concert: before they start playing, they first tune their instruments. I don’t often use a particular kindness practice at the beginning of meditation myself, but I find it very valuable to pay attention to the quality of my attention and try to find that sense of softness, of kindness in it, before I try to move forward with any kind of meditation technique.

Sometimes we can just plod on with our meditation, not really aware that we might be meditating with a negative state of mind, being judgemental or very critical of ourselves, trying hard to achieve something or struggling in some way. If that is the case, this simple quality of relaxing, softening a bit and bringing some kindness into the very way we relate to our own bodies or minds can make all the difference. For example, if you are doing mindfulness of breathing and you notice that you’ve spent the last twenty minutes planning tomorrow night’s dinner, at that moment, when you notice what you are doing, you are quite present; you are actually aware, you

are doing what you are supposed to be doing. But what do you do next? Do you feel happy because you're present at this moment, because you've actually noticed, or do you judge yourself for having wasted twenty minutes of time? See what a difference it makes in how we evaluate our practice, in how we move on from there; whether we move into our judging mode, or into a state where we can celebrate presence whenever we are aware of it.

To celebrate presence, to develop an appreciative, non-judgemental awareness, this quality of kindness has to be there. In fact, it seems to me to be an inherent quality of awareness that is unobstructed. Unobstructed awareness is not some kind of sterile, unfeeling observation. In the Buddhist scriptures we have the term *citta*, which we translate variously as 'heart', 'mind' or 'heart-mind', because it covers both the knowing mind and our sensitivity, the feeling heart. If awareness is to serve as a refuge, as a space of knowing which is liberating, which can embrace our experience in a non-reactive way, it has to have both of these qualities, knowing and feeling. It is therefore an experience that can be accessed through them both. Generally we try to access it more through what we take to be the knowing quality, mindfulness, by just knowing what is present. But to do so properly, we have to attend to its affective quality as well. 'Just knowing' is a feeling kind of knowing, so awareness also means the capacity to 'just feel' whatever we feel, without reacting, and to create a space that is naturally kind, naturally equanimous in the heart.

Awareness receives experiences in a non-judgemental way. It has no preferences itself and will receive and acknowledge our preferences like any other experience. If we manage to take refuge in awareness, to abide in it, it also offers us the strength not to follow our preferences or need them to be met in order to feel contented. It can therefore serve as a foundation for patience, for equanimity. The heart space of awareness is responsive; it will resonate naturally, spontaneously, with the quality of our experience – with compassion towards pain and suffering, and with joy towards what is wholesome and pleasant. In Buddhism these qualities, compassion and wisdom, always go together; one without the other is really unbalanced and not quite complete. So you can see the connection of *mettā* meditation to insight – it belongs naturally to an awareness which can simply receive our experience, without reacting.

Mettā meditation, then, is not about producing particular kinds of loving feelings, which may or may not arise. I prefer Luang Por Sumedho's translation of *mettā* as 'patient kindness' rather than 'loving-kindness', because it doesn't have to manifest as good feeling or lovingness. This essential basic quality of warm unobstructed awareness is more about being patient. Being truly patient is not grinding our teeth and putting up with something, but willingly allowing an experience to be here, even if we don't like it. I think that's something we can notice when we meet people who are kind and very open; they

are so helpful, particularly if we are suffering and therefore feel constricted, because they are able to receive us and our pain in a spacious, non-judgemental way, because they are very present. Thus the strength of equanimity serves as a foundation for our kindness.

Kindness meditation can also work as a tool for unifying the mind. When I visited Amaravati Monastery some years ago, we had a lot of business meetings, and between the meetings I spoke to many old friends whom I hadn't seen for some time. There was a lot of talking and taking in news, and much of it was about difficulties people had. After a few days of that my mind was in a bit of a state. Finally I had a free morning. I got up quite early and thought: 'Oh, great, I'll go into this little shrine room and meditate.' I was by myself and sat in front of the Buddha image, and practised what I would usually

The heart space of awareness is responsive; it will resonate naturally, spontaneously, with the quality of our experience ...

do – awareness of the body, awareness of the breath and just being with whatever was manifesting. But my mind was all over the place, manifesting endless chatter about all the news I had been taking in, particularly the difficulties, and trying to think up solutions for those problems. The result of that certainly wasn't *samādhi*, wasn't well-being or restfulness or peace.

Then suddenly, as I was thinking about one person in particular, this phrase came up in my mind: 'May you be well, may you be peaceful, may you be happy.' I thought: 'Oh, that's interesting.' I hadn't intended or tried to do that practice, but of course it was a practice I'd known for a long time and done every now and then, so it had become a skill the mind had kept stored away, and at that point remembered. The phrase seemed just to pop up, so I picked it up. I listened to it, and then I thought about somebody else, and again this phrase came up: 'May you be well, may you be peaceful, may you be happy.' And then it just took on its own momentum, coming out effortlessly almost like a mantra. For all those different people I was thinking about, their situations, their problems, there was always this single response: 'May you be well, may you be peaceful, may you be happy.' Many different problems came into my mind, but my heart always responded in the same way, with the same attitude. It felt rather good! And it was genuine; I didn't make it up or try to feel it. And I could focus on it, enable it, allow it to continue. As I stayed with it, it started to pacify and unify the mind. Previously I had been trying to be with the body or the breath somehow, but I just couldn't; it felt like trying to put up a tent in the middle of a storm. But this I could do. It worked as a response to the chaos in my mind, and so I could also extend it to myself: 'May I be well, may I be peaceful, may I be happy.' The mind started to unify on that one attitude. And then I was able to feel it in the body, finally bringing my attention into the body in a very pleasant way.

That was quite a revelation for me, because I had not often tried this as a formal meditation exercise. It seemed just to initiate itself at that moment, when I felt tired and helpless with all the noise in my head. Once the process had begun by

(Continued on page 41)

It's Not How You Think It Is

From a Dhamma talk given by Ajahn Candasiri during an eight-day retreat in 2013

THIS EVENING, I'D LIKE TO OFFER SOME REFLECTIONS AROUND the

theme of Dependent Origination. This core teaching of the Buddha can be summarized simply as follows:

Mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) happen because of ignorance (*avijjā*); consciousness (*viññāṇa*) happens because of mental formations; mind and body (*nāmarūpa*) happen because of consciousness; the six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*) happen because of mind and body; contact (*phassa*) happens because of the six sense bases; feeling (*vedanā*) happens because of contact; desire (*taṇhā*) happens because of feeling; clinging (*upādāna*) happens because of desire; becoming (*bhava*) happens because of clinging; birth (*jāti*) happens because of becoming; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (*dukkha*) happen because of birth.

You have just all chanted the request for a Dhamma talk together as a group. It's interesting to consider how for that to happen well, there has to be a kind of a blending, a sense of co-operation; it doesn't really work if there's one person who wants to stand out and be special. The identity is as a group, everyone doing it together. When we consider Dependent Origination, we see that the first link is between ignorance, *avijjā*, and mental formations, *saṅkhāra*. In this context, ignorance is not understanding or seeing clearly the true nature of existence. This leads to the very strong tendency we have to create 'Me', the personality that stands out, that stands apart from everybody else; and this is the beginning of the whole chain of factors that ends with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair, or *dukkha*.

In our culture we are programmed to stand out, to be special. It's considered very important to have a 'personality' that's special in some way. However, in fact this is an expression of ignorance, the first factor in the chain. We haven't really understood that each of us – and all of existence – is simply part of a large number of interconnected phenomena that blend together. We put a lot of energy into being separate and special, but actually we are not as separate as we think we are. Even these physical bodies are interconnected. We breathe in air from the atmosphere. It goes through our noses, down into our lungs and becomes part of us, what we think of as 'Me', part of the body. And when we breathe air out, it goes into the room – and then somebody else breathes it in, so it becomes part of them!



Ajahn Candasiri (centre back) during a gathering of the nuns' community held at Milntuim Hermitage, Scotland.

There's a continuous interconnection with the environment around us. It's the same with the food we eat and the fluids that we drink; they're all just part of nature, flowing in and flowing out. Then the skin gets worn away, the flakes of skin become dust, then part of the earth. They say it takes about seven years for these bodies to recycle themselves. I remember Ajahn Sumedho saying that his was an 'alms-food body' because he had been living for a lot more than seven years on

alms-food; so his body was totally made up of alms-food. And it's the same for my body, and those of other nuns and monks who have lived as alms mendicants for a long time. So these bodies, although they look quite separate, are actually just part of nature.

When there's *avijjā*, not seeing clearly, there's a tendency to create *saṅkhāra* – to stick things together as mental formations. The Buddha pointed to five *khandhas* or 'heaps': *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, *viññāṇa* (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness), which get stuck together to create the *saṅkhāra* of 'Me', this massive *saṅkhāra*: Me. Myself. And of course, once you've got one 'me', you've got other 'me's', all in relation to one another. This is where we can come into conflict, because we're not always going to see things in the same way as everybody else; there are many different points of view.

Also, this particular society conditions us to be very competitive. We're brought up to try to be the best, so we put a lot of effort into doing well at school, doing well in sport; there are various values which are held to be particularly important. For example, when I was a child a lot of importance was placed on IQ (Intelligence Quotient). One Christmas my younger sister was given a book about how to test your IQ. We all tried it – and my score was much lower than everybody else's. I was pretty upset ... It was a struggle, because there was such an emphasis on being the best.

However, intelligence is just one aspect of humanity, and over the years I've met many people who probably wouldn't score very high on an IQ test, but yet have really wonderful gifts that perhaps might not be rated so highly in this culture (and it's a great pity that they're not); qualities like kindness, patience, understanding, flexibility. Whereas our society rates intelligence more highly because then you can get a good degree and a good job, and make lots of money. And for most people having lots of money is considered to be very important; then you are seen as a success.

I have been greatly heartened in recent years by meeting people

who are definitely very skilled, very gifted, and yet quite deliberately earn just enough money to live at a modest level of comfort. I really celebrate that. They're not intent on acquiring more than they need, or having bigger and better cars, houses, computers or other gadgets.

But back to this *saṅkhāra*: 'Me'. All kinds of labels can be stuck onto it. Buddhist, British, female, nun, sister, daughter; those are some of my labels. Each one of you will have your own set of labels which are all part of the composite personality, this *saṅkhāra* that exists in relation to others. Further, there is a sense of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) associated with the *saṅkhāra* of 'me'; this is a sense consciousness that defines the limits of 'me'. It relies on, is dependent on, having a body and a mind (*nāmarūpa*).

Now, without the body and mind we wouldn't have sense bases (*saḷāyatana*), would we? We wouldn't have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, the ability to experience sensations in the body and to notice thought – to be aware of what we're thinking, what we're feeling, all that is going on within our minds. These six sense bases enable us to recognize the things around us. These perceptions all arise because we have sense bases. We have sense bases because we have a body. With the body there is a consciousness. And the consciousness is of that phenomenon that we call 'Me'.

The sense bases are the condition for contact (*phassa*). If you didn't have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind, you wouldn't receive impressions from the environment; and you wouldn't be aware of the body itself. Of course, there are people whose senses have been damaged, or maybe they were born blind, deaf, or not able to smell, taste or to sense things in the body. And probably all of us are a bit deficient in one sense or another; certainly as we get older, these sense organs tend to diminish in their sensitivity.

When there is contact, that is the condition for feeling (*vedanā*). We can notice whether there is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral contact. Now, this one is particularly interesting, because if something pleasant arises, we want more of it; desire (*taṇhā*) arises. It can be something very ordinary. Say, here, in the morning around the kitchen there is the smell of toast; so there is contact between the fragrance of toast and the nose. For me this gives rise to a pleasant feeling, the anticipation of breakfast – and *toast* for breakfast! And there is the desire to eat the toast, and if all goes according to plan, soon we're reborn happily munching on our breakfast toast. However, if someone came along and said, 'No. You can't have any toast today', I might experience a strong unpleasant feeling; there could be disappointment or anger, because the desire had been frustrated. This could lead into quite a negative reaction. And so we are reborn in a negative state.

We can see how pleasant feeling is the condition for the arising of desire and then, if we're not mindful, there is clinging, or attachment (*upādāna*), which naturally leads us into becoming (*bhava*) and birth (*jāti*). When there is unpleasant feeling, like if we were looking forward to having toast, and somebody said, 'You can't have any', the frustrated desire might express itself as anger. And then we find ourselves reborn angry and grumpy for the rest of the day!

In some ways this is quite a simple chain of conditions that can be interrupted at certain points. If we contemplate this link between *vedanā*: 'Hmm that smells nice', and *taṇhā*: 'I want it', we discover that we can actually stop the chain there: 'Hmm, that smells nice ...' full stop. We choose to not think any more about it.

In the monastery people very occasionally cook in the evening. Perhaps someone has offered a special breakfast *dāna* and they bake bread. So this incredible aroma of freshly baked bread spreads all around the monastery. If you're on the Eight Precepts this can be difficult, because there's a sense of honour around keeping the Precepts, especially not taking food after midday. The desire for food can be very strong, so we need a clear intention, a good container, for that desire. In the evening when we're hungry the desire can be immediate: 'I want some of that bread which smells so delicious!' However, rather than allowing any attachment to the

desire, we can break the chain between desire ('I want it') and clinging ('I'm going to have it'). We can stop the mind from going in the direction of clinging: 'Hmm, that smells nice, I'd really like some – but I'm keeping the Precepts, so I won't have any. It simply doesn't get led into the rebirth – munching a piece of freshly baked bread!

Years ago I had a similar experience in relation to chocolate. This is something that we *can* have in the evening, but some-

times during the *Vassa* I would make a resolution to not have chocolate. It was interesting to notice how easy it could be. If a plate of chocolate came round and I had made a conscious decision not to have any, I could easily just pass it on to the next person. However, if there was the slightest doubt (because I like chocolate), if I actually reached out and picked up a piece, I noticed how difficult it then was to let go of it. If the desire process *taṇhā* had led to a clinging *upādāna* and the rebirth was about to happen, it was very difficult to let go so that it would un-happen. Whereas if I was clear about my determination, even though there was the desire to have some chocolate, I could choose not to follow it. I didn't have to attach to that desire; it wasn't a question of letting go, it was just a question of not clinging in the first place.

This is also a useful insight in terms of our inner practice; to recognize that there are times when we actually have a choice to not allow the mind to go in a certain direction. Once I was very angry and there was a strong sense of wanting to punish someone. Fortunately, I was also very clear about the harmfulness of acting on such a negative impulse, so I could just stop it, cut it. Not because I was frightened of the anger, but because I could see that it wouldn't be at all helpful; it wouldn't support well-being, either for myself or for the other person.

Giving up self-disparagement is the same kind of thing. As we become more mindful, more aware of our habitual ways of thinking and can notice them more quickly, it is possible to just stop the mind from going in a harmful direction. An example of this was when my brother and sister sponsored me to go on a retreat at a beautiful place in southern Spain for my sixtieth birthday. I really wanted to have a 'good' retreat, doing 'good' practice so it would be

In our culture we are programmed to stand out ... to have a 'personality' that's special ... in fact, this is an expression of ignorance ...

a positive experience. Well, one morning I overslept – and my mind started into a whole negative tirade: ‘Your practice is no good! You’ve been practising all these years and you’re still a hopeless nun! You’ll never be any good ... and you don’t even enjoy it particularly. You should want to sit and have *samādhi*! You’re USELESS!’ It went on and on, so I decided to write it all down. Interestingly, I remembered having done a similar exercise on a retreat fifteen years previously – the two monologues were identical! Exactly the same boring stuff was pouring out, the same habitual ways of thinking.

So then I decided to try replacing the habitual negative thoughts with more positive thoughts. Every time a thought of self-disparagement came up: ‘Oh, Candasiri, you shouldn’t have rested so long! Oh, Candasiri, you’re being lazy! Oh, Candasiri, you shouldn’t be going out for a walk; no, you should be meditating in your *kuti*!’ – instead I would say to myself: ‘Candasiri, everything you do on this retreat is good practice. You’ve been practising sincerely, diligently all these years. You’re a good nun, and everything you do on this retreat is good practice!’

I did this for the rest of the retreat. As soon as there was the slightest little murmuring: ‘Oh dear, that wasn’t very good ...’, I would replace it with: ‘Everything you do, Candasiri, is good practice.’ And I had a really good time; I was really happy.

So it’s really important to notice the kind of thoughts that we have, how we undermine our sense of well-being through our negative thinking. And it’s all fabricated. It’s all simply a *sankhāra*. It’s not true. We make it up: ‘Good me’, ‘bad me’, ‘mediocre me’, ‘could do better me’; all these are just ideas we have about ourselves, they’re entirely creations.

Now you might say that ‘I’m a wonderful me, and my practice is really good’ is a creation as well. And I have to agree; but isn’t it better to create something positive and bright, something that’s actually going to lift us up and encourage us, rather than to believe in the negative, miserable, discouraging things we habitually create in the mind? I would call this a skilful means.

We can be so cruel to ourselves, so mean, but it’s because of the way we’ve been conditioned. It’s a habit that we’ve picked up, training we received from when we were very little. I’ve thought about this and realized that my mother had very high standards. I’d struggle to live up to them, and my sense is that her mother had also had very high standards to live up to. I could see that the conditioning goes back through the generations, each one passing it on to the next. We don’t need to blame anybody; however, it’s interesting to consider that for us there is the possibility of not passing on that conditioning to our children and to the people we are teaching and guiding.

Once an elderly nun from Africa came to visit our monastery. Some of the Sisters asked her how she trained young nuns who were stubborn and difficult to train. She said, ‘Well, with firmness ... and with a lot of love.’ This was a real surprise to me: the possibility of actually loving and caring for the people one was training; that it was all right to love each other, to care for each other in that way. It was a really important lesson. Rather than passing on our anxiety about whether they’re good enough or whether we’re

training them properly, we can actually support each other with love. I realized that when people are relaxed, when they feel at ease, they naturally want to learn. It’s not a question of having to force people to obey. Similarly with ourselves. Can we find a way to guide ourselves with gentleness, kindness and humour ... and occasionally, when it’s necessary, with a little bit of firmness?


When you come to talk to me about your practice, I sense that many of you are very harsh with yourselves. You intend after the retreat to meditate every single day for a certain amount of time and, up to a certain standard. But when, inevitably, it slips a bit, you respond by trying harder, you’re even stricter with yourselves; and then you get discouraged, you begin to dislike the whole idea of practice! It makes you feel bad because you think you can’t do it the way you should; you undermine yourselves all the time. It’s really important that we begin to relate to ourselves in a more kindly way, to actually trust in that longing deep within us to be free.

From time to time in our community we have a chance to spend a few weeks in solitary retreat in a *kuti*, following our own rhythm of practice. To start with there can be some anxiety that without the structure of the monastic routine we’ll end up wasting our time, loafing around, doing nothing. However, I’ve noticed

that if I can relax and see what happens, rather than trying to impose some definite structure, the mind naturally inclines to meditating. Perhaps I sleep a bit more for the first couple of days, particularly if I’m exhausted after working very hard, but after that I usually find that I meditate much more than I would have expected. I enjoy staying up late at night; I enjoy getting up early in the morning. It’s almost as though the heart is longing to do that.

So really trust that longing to wake up, to see things clearly and to understand the ways that we cause suffering for ourselves; please don’t be too harsh with yourselves. If you oversleep one day, try assuming that maybe you were a bit tired and needed to rest, rather than that your practice is going down the drain. If we’re too harsh we can become discouraged, miserable; and I’ve noticed that I do much better when I’m happy. Much, much better. So even if there are difficult things happening around you and people aren’t treating you very kindly, at least you can treat yourself kindly. This is really important.

So just consider the possibility of treating yourselves kindly, considerately; don’t be too harsh. You can be firm, you can be disciplined. That’s fine. But always with a sense of kindness, wishing the very best for yourself. That’s what the Buddha wanted for us; that’s why he presented his teaching in the first place. This beautiful teaching was presented for the welfare and happiness of human beings, not to make them feel wretched and miserable because they weren’t practising well enough!

I remember on retreat at Chithurst, when I was feeling really discouraged, there was a wonderful moment as I was standing looking towards the lake – just standing there with all these miserable thoughts about how useless I was flooding through the mind, when suddenly, out of nowhere, this small, quiet thought arose: ‘It’s not how you think it is ...’

... isn't it better to create something positive and bright – something that's actually going to lift us up and encourage us ...

LUNAR CALENDAR 2014

These days are traditionally given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome. Please enquire at the monasteries, as routines vary.

January	● 8 (Wed.)	○ 15 (Wed.)	● 23 (Thur.)	● 30 (Thur.)
February	● 7 (Fri.)	○ 14 (Fri.) ¹	● 22 (Sat.)	● 28 (Fri.)
March	● 8 (Sat.)	○ 15 (Sat.)	● 23 (Sun.)	● 30 (Sun.)
April	● 7 (Mon.)	○ 14 (Mon.)	● 22 (Tue.)	● 28 (Mon.)
May	● 6 (Tue.)	○ 13 (Tue.) ²	● 21 (Wed.)	● 28 (Wed.)
June	● 5 (Thur.)	○ 12 (Thur.)	● 20 (Fri.)	● 26 (Thur.)
July	● 4 (Fri.)	○ 11 (Fri.) ³	● 19 (Sat.)	● 26 (Sat.)
August	● 3 (Sun.)	○ 10 (Sun.)	● 18 (Mon.)	● 24 (Sun.)
September	● 1 (Mon.)	○ 8 (Mon.)	● 16 (Tue.)	● 23 (Tue.)
October	● 1 (Wed.)	○ 8 (Wed.) ⁴	● 16 (Thur.)	● 22 (Wed.) ● 30 (Thur.)
November	○ 6 (Thur.)	● 14 (Fri.)	● 21 (Fri.)	● 29 (Sat.)
December	○ 6 (Sat.)	● 14 (Sun.)	● 20 (Sat.)	● 28 (Sun.)

¹Māgha Pūjā

²Vesākha Pūjā

³Āsālhā Pūjā

⁴Pavāraṇā Day

Please note that, at Amaravati Monastery, generally there is no evening pūjā on the evenings before and after the lunar day, unless that day falls on a Saturday. Also, there is no morning pūjā on the lunar day and the day afterwards.

For Friends and Supporters of Amaravati in Thailand

We realize that there are many people in Thailand who are both familiar with Amaravati Monastery and who would like to support it. We also realize that the process of trying to send funds from one country to another can be complicated, time-consuming and sometimes expensive.

A group of supporters in Thailand has therefore set up a bank account for Amaravati Monastery in Bangkok so that donations can easily be made there and then, periodically, forwarded to the Amaravati account here in the UK.

This account is with the Bangkok Bank and it is being administered by Khun Anintita Posakrisna, a good friend of this community. The account number is 179-473420-0, account name is Amaro Bhikkhu, Banchak Branch. (The account is under the name of the Abbot simply because Amaravati Monastery is not a registered institution in Thailand; please note therefore that this is not a personal account for Ajahn Amaro but rather that his name is simply here to represent Amaravati Monastery.)

This account has been established for the convenience of those people in Thailand who wish to make donations to support Amaravati. We hope that this will accordingly bring the joy that comes from giving to those who wish make a donation, while also helping to meet the many expenses of running Amaravati Monastery. If you would like any more information please contact Khun Anintita Posakrisna or M.L. Pakamal Kasemsri, Siamsaamtri School, Telephone numbers 02-311-0134 and 02-331-6258-60.

ข่าวถึงญาติโยมในประเทศไทย

เนื่องด้วย ทางวัดตระหนกวัดว่า ญาติโยมทางประเทศไทยจำนวนมากที่คุ้นเคยรู้จักวัดอมราวดี มีความประสงค์จะทำบุญกับทางวัด แต่การส่งปัจจัยจากประเทศหนึ่งไปยังอีกประเทศหนึ่งนั้น มีขั้นตอนยุ่งยาก ต้องใช้เวลา และบางครั้งมีค่าใช้จ่ายสูงด้วย

ญาติธรรมในประเทศไทยกลุ่มหนึ่ง จึงได้เปิดบัญชีธนาคารสำหรับวัดอมราวดีขึ้นที่กรุงเทพฯ เพื่อให้สะดวกต่อการบริจาคปัจจัย และปัจจัยส่วนนี้จะโอนมาเข้าบัญชีเงินฝากของวัดอมราวดีที่ประเทศอังกฤษเป็นระยะๆ

ทางวัดเปิดบัญชีเงินฝากไว้กับธนาคารกรุงเทพฯ สาขาบางจาก เลขที่บัญชี 179-473420-0 ชื่อบัญชี Amaro Bhikkhu โดยทางวัด ได้ไว้วางใจมอบให้ คุณอนินทิตา โปษะกฤษณะ เป็นผู้ดูแลบัญชี (บัญชีนี้ ใช้ชื่อท่านเจ้าอาวาสเป็นชื่อบัญชี เนื่องจากวัดอมราวดี มิได้จดทะเบียนเป็นองค์กรในประเทศไทย ดังนั้น บัญชีนี้ จึงมิใช่เป็นบัญชีส่วนตัวของอาจารย์อมโรแต่อย่างใด หากแต่เป็นบัญชีในนามตัวแทนของวัดอมราวดีเท่านั้น)

บัญชีนี้ เปิดขึ้นเพื่ออำนวยความสะดวกให้กับญาติโยมในประเทศไทย ที่ประสงค์จะบริจาคปัจจัย เพื่อสนับสนุนการดำเนินงานของวัดอมราวดี ทางวัดมีความมุ่งหวังว่า การบอกข่าวนี้ จะเป็นเหตุนำความปีติโสมนัสอันจะเกิดจากการบำเพ็ญทาน มาให้แก่ท่านที่มีความประสงค์จะร่วมทำบุญบริจาค พร้อมกันนั้น ท่านก็ยังจะได้เข้ามามีส่วนช่วยร่วมสมทบค่าใช้จ่ายที่ต้องใช้ในการดำเนินกิจการต่างๆ ของวัดอมราวดี

หากท่านต้องการข้อมูลเพิ่มเติม กรุณาติดต่อ คุณอนินทิตา โปษะกฤษณะ หรือ หม่อมหลวง ผกามาลย์ เกษมศรี โรงเรียนสยามสามไตร โทร. 02-311-0134 และ 02-331-6258-60

The Wisdom of Emotions

An extract of a Dhamma talk by Ajahn Sundarā

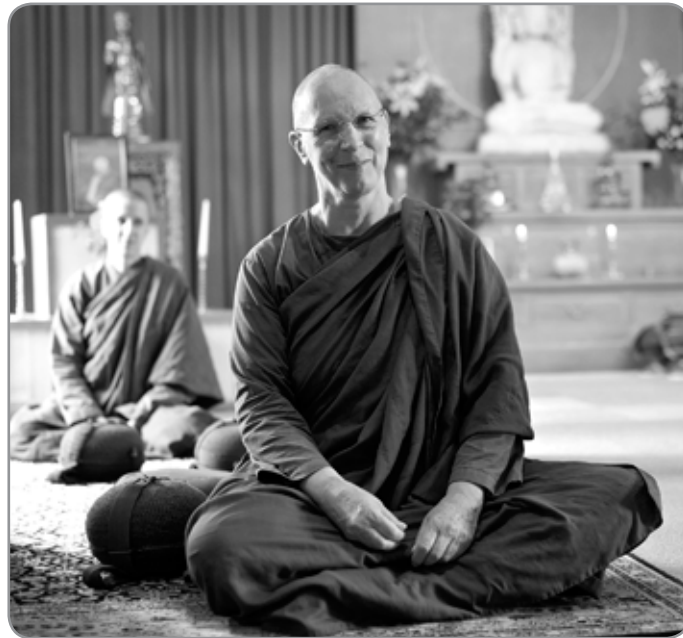
OUR EMOTIONS CAN BE TRIGGERED BY SOMETHING VERY SMALL: A PHYSICAL SENSATION, A PASSING THOUGHT, A SENSE CONTACT, A FEELING. In the context of Dhamma we begin to notice that in fact emotions are constructs:

amalgams of thought, feeling, perceptions, past conditioning, trauma, family stories; all these things come together to generate emotions. Sometimes we are in a situation where for no apparent reason we start crying, or we become angry or confused. When we search for a reason but can't find one, we may think there is something wrong with us, that it's our fault. We make ourselves miserable because we don't understand that there is a bigger picture. Being human is like that.

Modern psychology has not been able to define emotion. Decades of brain research have failed to pin down what an emotion is. It fluctuates constantly; it is indefinable. So we may be sitting calmly in meditation, surrounded by a lot of other people, but when somebody else comes into the room our sense of calm changes. We are aware of a new feeling tone, perhaps an emotional charge in the body and we soon realize that letting go of it requires more than just awareness and willingness to let go. It also calls for wisdom, for understanding, so as to see deeply its true characteristics of *anicca-dukkha-anattā* – that it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

The terms 'wisdom' and 'emotion' seem to be foreign to each other. We don't usually associate emotion with wisdom. Interestingly, emotions are closely connected to the water element. A well-known teacher in the Forest Tradition has pointed out that we are very concerned about ecology and the purity of the elements on the planet, but we rarely consider how polluted our inner water element can be. When we are not mindful of our emotions, they can become septic. Unfortunately, through that lack of awareness, they can also become extremely powerful and affect our whole inner environment, just as water can filter through and pollute its natural environment.

However, it can be difficult to look clearly at some emotions – anger, jealousy, envy, greed – because they are so painful. But the Buddha's path begins with the recognition of suffering. It is only when we are able to see suffering that



Ajahn Sundarā

we can know there is an end to suffering. *Dukkha*, suffering, is sometimes translated as 'stress'. This is a good translation. When we look at our emotions we are looking at stress, at tension. But we may find that although we study our mind and our body, our inner stories or the way we relate to other people, we are not yet actually seeing the stress associated with them. We know there is something stressful in us, something miserable, something sad or sticky, but we can't yet see it clearly. Very often that's because it is too close to us. It's like a second skin, there's not enough space between us and that emotional resonance.

I often recall that for many years I did not think that I was angry in certain situations. I was just right! It took me a long time to see anger as an objective experience, as something separate from me. I thought I knew all about anger: I taught other people how to deal with it, I studied it, I meditated on it, but it still wasn't completely clear. I did not know it totally, without any doubt. However, once anger is clearly seen as toxic, any idea of 'righteous' anger goes out the window.

Greed is another strong emotion, not just greed for food, but greed for anything. In fact it was the energy of greed that brought me to the Dhamma. I realized that desire is a bottomless pit; it would never be satisfied. No matter how many delicious things you eat, how many wonderful holidays you have, how many wonderful relationships you enjoy, dissatisfaction is always around the corner. That's what the Buddha calls *dukkha*. Now, when you see desire clearly, you also see its characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. Ask yourself who is the 'I' who desires and is constantly dissatisfied? Who is seeking sensory gratification? Who is the 'I' who is righteously angry? Until you see through the illusion of 'I' you will be trapped in desire. Of course, even when there is some insight

into the nature of desire and the emotional suffering which results, that doesn't mean the habit of desire doesn't continue, or that you won't be blinded again. But you have seen and known the patterns of desire and begin to realize the importance of developing wisdom with regard to your emotions.

Letting go of an emotion can take time. Even though it may have completely ended in your mind, your body can still be filled with residual feelings of rage, greed or sadness. The body and mind don't always talk to each other. You may need to be really patient and conscious of how the body absorbs and releases emotion much more slowly than the mind. You may think that these emotions are happening because of something you did, but actually they are reactions to what we find pleasant or unpleasant, what we like or dislike. We don't need to blame ourselves, but simply to recognize that when mindfulness is not present, life happens on automatic pilot! This is an aspect of *anattā*.

Sometimes the mind can be so filled up with emotion that the brain loses the capacity to think, and we cannot express ourselves. At such times of heightened emotion the mind seems to have a kind of protective mechanism, the capacity to disengage. When we have a strong emotional experience, we tend to over-react and lose clarity. Because we don't have the ability to respond to the situation, the mind simply shuts down.

If we were truly in charge of our mind, we would rather have a calm and peaceful mind instead of the agitation and disturbances that we often have to experience. Yet when an emotion is present, we can see it as a priceless opportunity. Even though it may be a painful moment, when we stay very present and connected to the heat and energy coursing through us, we will see it change and lose its emotional charge. We will be able to let it go. But if we're not aware of it, it will revive a lot of old stories. If we believe our emotions, they drag countless stories along with them, everything associated with that particular emotion. And emotions are not choosy; any old thing may come up and until we see through and understand those associations, they are a terrible burden. Sometimes you may wonder how our emotional nature and wisdom can come together.

A great master like Ajahn Chah would set up situations where his disciples would see their emotional nature. He would push their buttons to the point where they would become really angry, driving their minds into an intense emotional state. This is perhaps not the kind of teaching you would ask for right now, but if it came your way how would you respond? Would you start complaining and blaming the situation? Would you criticize the people involved? Or would you use the situation as a teaching? In fact, you may have noticed that life gives plenty of opportunities to challenge and test us. Somebody always seems to be 'stepping on our toes'. In that respect life is our great teacher. You may think: 'No, I'm going to meditate so I can calm down. I'm going to stay away from

all that.' But remember that the state of calm is just one aspect of the practice. In Buddhism the mind is compared to a clear lake, but when we observe it we may overlook the rubbish at the bottom, and lose our chance to be free from delusion.

Walking the Path isn't hard in and of itself. But it is hard for the sense of self, that illusory entity called 'me' who is so resistant to liberation. Again, this self is a collection of habits, it's not a fault. You don't have a 'me' because you wanted one. It just happened. You didn't want to have an ego, a deluded ego which you may hate right now: 'My personality – I'm terrible!' We are very good at self-denigration; indeed, it may even have a comfortable feeling.

So how can we start befriending our emotional nature? Perhaps at first the head leads. We know what to do, we may have read all the teachings on emotions and we are filled

As we become very present with our emotions, it's amazing how this presence of mind itself can cool down our reactions in a very natural and gentle way.

with good intentions. Then as Dhamma practice becomes part of our life, we draw closer to our heart. This may be frightening because the heart has a soft, vulnerable, fluid quality, unlike the mental energy in our head, which can be hard and quite rigid. When we come into the heart area we begin to be in touch with a much more nebulous world as we move from the mental energy towards a more sensitive aspect of our mind and body. We begin to feel and connect with our emotional

experience directly, without confusion. We discover that in the realm of emotions things are much less defined. There are no clear partitions and boundaries. Emotions can be treacherous because they can spread and affect other beings. For a mind which is attached to logic and intellectual clarity, practice can be difficult, because seeing clearly has nothing to do with having an idea about things; it is the ability to see things as they are, here and now, with presence of mind.

As we become very present with our emotions, it's amazing how this presence of mind can cool down our reactions in a very natural way. Just by staying fully present when emotions arise, we can witness how they change and fade away. Whereas if we are not aware of this straightaway, our emotions can turn into an enormous story involving 'me' and 'him', and 'them' and 'us', and 'how dare you?' Then emotions can become a mountain of problems. But I'm sure none of us want to have a mountain of problems. We don't ask for them, they just happen to us. This is *anattā*. There is no self in control, just the results of habits. When we say, 'I wish I was not so angry. I wish I was not so jealous', we still think we're in control of our emotions, but actually we are not. We are only in control when we start looking at them through the lens of mindfulness and clear understanding. In Dhamma practice, mindfulness and clear seeing are simply allowed to take charge. When we are able to look at ourselves in that calm, quiet light of mindfulness, without judgement, compassion naturally arises and we can accept ourselves just as we are. That moment is a complete acceptance of what is. ☸

Journey to the Centre of the World

~ A circling of Mount Kailash ~

by Ajahn Amaro

HERE IS THE WATCH
MY MOTHER GAVE
MY FATHER on their wedding day, his initials engraved upon the back. Here is a dress that the daughter of Tan Dhammarakkho, Hannah Renshaw, wore before she died at the age of two, in a mysterious fire at Chithurst in 1983. Here is a thimble belonging to Chris Smith's great-grandmother ... all precious relics, family treasures. Now we enshrine them on the slopes of Mount Kailash and walk away, climbing the final slope to the Dolma La pass, leaving family and the rest of our past behind.

Breathe. Keep breathing deeply. Breathe as fully as possible, opening every cleft of lung.

Everything, the whole world, is gathered at this point. Here is the 'still point of the turning world', the *axis mundi*, Mount Meru at the centre of the cosmos. 'At the still point, there the dance is', the dance of motion and pause, one foot in front of the other, and then not. Water, rock, both still and flowing.

Steadily, going nowhere, the mountain falls away beneath the feet until the heights of Dolma La are reached: 'still and still moving into another intensity ...' 'In my end is my beginning.' 'In my beginning is my end.'



The news that I planned to go on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in the spring of 2013 was regularly met with a blank look. People would ask: 'Where is that?' or 'Why is that a special place?' 'Good question', was probably the most appropriate reply.

I knew that Mount Kailash was in Tibet and that it was considered to be a holy place by both Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists; these two groups seem to have been aware of the uniqueness of the mountain from ancient times. To Hindus it is the earthly embodiment of the axial mountain of the heavens, Meru, and is the abode of Lord Shiva. To Tibetans



The north face of Mount Kailash, seen from Dirapuk Monastery.

it is Sumeru, also the cosmic centre of the universe. Mount Kailash has thus been a magnet for pilgrims for millennia.

On looking up more of its history I found out that unlike the gneiss rock of most of the Himalayas, Mount Kailash was formed of ancient Tertiary gravel lifted up on granite, and had once been the highest island in the primordial Tethys Sea.

Its mystique is enhanced by the facts that it stands high, alone, is snow-peaked year-round and is mysteriously symmetrical, like a natural pyramid; and because four of the great rivers of the Indian subcontinent all have their source in the

region: the Sutlej, the Indus, the Brahmaputra and the Karnali, a tributary of the Ganges. It is for these reasons that it is almost certainly the origin of the Eastern myths of the World Mountain, the towering peak that is the axis of the universe.

I also knew that Luang Por Sumedho had made two attempts to go there, and had only been successful in making the journey and circumambulating the mountain on the second occasion. He had spoken often of the many spiritual blessings that had come from his pilgrimage, but in addition that it had been, 'The hardest thing I have ever done.' Other friends and Sangha members had also made the journey: Ajahn Sucitto, Kittisāro and Thānissarā, and Sister Thitamedhā; they too had all spoken of the sacred nature of the experience and the intensity of the physical challenges. At more than 15,000 feet the air is very thin, and a lowlander's body is easily unready or unable to bear this.



So what was the reason I was now planning to go there?

The short answer is, 'Nick Scott invited me.' The longer version is that Nick, as a *tudong* companion of many Sangha members over more than thirty years, had reached the age of sixty and, due to visibly waning capacities, had come to the conclusion he had just 'one more big adventure' in him.

Based on his friendship and past experiences with Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Sucitto, the thought of Mount Kailash as a destination immediately came to his mind, with me as a travelling companion. Other friends and Sangha members were polled, and soon there were plans for a group of three monks and three laymen to make the expedition.

I freely admit that at first I had no great inspiration to go; it would be an interesting jaunt in a unique environment and a good opportunity for a *tudong*-type journey in the wilderness, but until then the place had held little significance for me spiritually. It had no special place in the mythology of the Theravādin world, so it was not like visiting sites such as Bodhgāya or the Deer Park at Vārānasi, holy places where the Buddha himself had walked and talked and dwelt.

As the reality of the journey started to gel, more reflections on the symbolism of the *axis mundi* arose in my mind. This ancient and universal spiritual principle had been a frequent theme of Luang Por Sumedho's Dhamma talks over the years. He often reflected on how the mythological centre of the world, whether embodied as Mount Sumeru, Olympus or Yggdrasil the World Tree, is a symbol of the immanent centrality of consciousness, how, 'The heart of the universe is your heart.'

These reflections reminded me that with many spiritual principles there is a meeting of: a) the physical/historical reality; b) its mythological representation; and c) its psychological parallels. Thus the symbol of the *axis mundi* has its resonances in the physical reality of Mount Kailash, in its mythic reality as the centre of the cosmos and, lastly, in the awakened awareness of the here and now. On account of these reflections rippling through consciousness, the prospect of the journey gained appeal.

In addition, it had been five years since my previous *tudong* trip (also with Nick), so I was quite ready for another such excursion.

These backpacking trips, and the *tudong* principle in general, had always appealed to me. *Tudong* is an ancient monastic practice of journeying on foot through the countryside, often for weeks or months at a time, living simply and close to the elements, and often relying on the kind-

ness of strangers to provide sustenance along the way.

The Thai word *tudong* comes from the Pali *dhutaṅga*. The term refers to a set of practices such as living on one meal a day, not sleeping in a building or not lying down to rest, which are designed to help us cut through complacency by relin-

quishing our usual psychological escapes. By limiting access to and control over food, sleep and physical comfort, the only escape from *dukkha*, the experience of unsatisfactoriness, is via attitude.

Tudong is thus designed to help us meet the customary ways in which we evade, negotiate, deny or weasel our way out of discontent and difficulty, and instead learn to be adaptable, spiritually robust. It is very easy to tweak the world in any way we can contrive or finagle, in order to get away from what we dislike and to get what we want; if we are accomplished at such tweaking we never see how much we have

made ourselves slaves to self-centred desire and aversion. The practice of *tudong* is one means of breaking free of that bondage and enjoying the bliss of contentment. Of course, lack of oxygen is not one of the traditional austerities, but it was a key element in the prospective journey. As it turned out, even though the need to stop regularly and breathe deeply was a novel experience for most of us, it was swiftly clear that just like the other discomforts or inconveniences *tudong* brings, 'If you make it a problem, it's a problem. If you don't, it isn't.'

In the autumn of 2012 Ajahn Sucitto kindly came to Amravati and gave the group of us intended pilgrims a slide-show of pictures from his journey to Mount Kailash with Kittisāro and Thānissarā, along with his reflections on the experience. This was a pivotal moment for me, as it revealed two hitherto unappreciated or unknown aspects of the undertaking.

Firstly, his account of the physical and mental challenges of living in such thin air – how, for example, on one occasion his thinking faculties were so compromised that he held a cup of some hot drink in his hand for an hour, not knowing what to do with it – made it clear that physical fitness and acclimatization to altitude were of paramount importance. This aspect, as well as eliciting the question:



The pilgrims: (standing, from left) Nick Scott, Tan Dhammarakkho, Ajahn Amaro and Tan Appamādo; (in front, from left) Rory Hodd and Chris Smith.



The approach to The Gateway to the Valley of the Gods.

‘Why would anyone want to do that to themselves?’ impelled me to make great efforts to take exercise; weights and press-ups to help my lungs and heart along, and daily walks through the Hertfordshire countryside. This turned out to be a serendipitous source of blessings, in that along with toughening up the body, it also caused me to get to know many previously undiscovered nearby treasures in the way of woods and lanes, farms and open spaces, as well as lacing together an internal map of beautiful spots in the locality.

The second aspect was that I learned of the series of traditional contemplations and practices developed in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition which accompany the circumambulation of Mount Kailash. I had been given a few books to read on the subject and had heard some sketchy accounts in the past, but it was only on learning from Ajahn Sucitto how the circuit around the holy mountain was woven together with specific contemplations on karma and the processes of birth, death and rebirth, that the full meaning and value of the practice became clear.

On hearing the details of how various stations on the

Camp in the village of Dharapuri, Humla, Nepal.



thirty-two mile path around Mount Kailash marked specific stages of a sequence of contemplations, it was as if the proverbial light came on: ‘Oh, *that’s* what it’s all about.’ The light came on, colour came into the world, and the prospect of the journey transmuted from: ‘interesting jaunt in a fascinating place’ to ‘pilgrimage to the holy mountain in order to awaken.’ It came alive.



The process of fitness training and acclimatization was helped along greatly by a ten-day trek through the Atlas Mountains of Morocco with Nick, his partner Micheline and Stephen Batchelor. The location had been chosen on the advice of Andrew Yates, who was not only the architect of the Dhamma Hall at Chithurst, but also the guide who led Luang Por Sumedho’s first attempt to get to Mount Kailash, an attempt that was thwarted by the Chinese authorities at the border.

This journey through the Atlas Mountains and the experiences and conversations we had along the way might be the subject for a travelogue on its own. However, suffice it to say for now that it was a well-chosen environment in which to do some hiking and altitude training, and to be living in circumstances close to what we would experience in Asia.

The acclimatization process was further developed by our plan to enter Tibet on foot, following the Humla Karnali River from Simikot to the border town of Hilsa. This was precisely the route that Luang



Stūpa at Namkha Kyung Dzong Monastery, above the Humla Karnali River, Nepal.

Por Sumedho had followed with Andrew Yates and their party in 1997. Nick had opted for this trail deliberately, not just because it was an ideal method of getting us fit and more used to the terrain (which it was), but more as a way of following in the master’s footsteps.

Throughout these months of preparation, particularly up in the heights of the Atlas Mountains and over the passes in Humla, but also on the frosty paths of Hertfordshire, a few realizations dawned.

Firstly, when walking with a thirty or forty-pound pack, doing twenty-five or thirty miles in a day or crossing a pass at ten thousand feet or more, you realize that spreading

loving-kindness through the body is essential. Naturally, one should spread loving-kindness at all times, and friendliness towards our own body is an intrinsic part of that. However, life in the lowlands and without physical challenges causes this to be easily forgotten, especially in the comfortable, convenient conditions of the West; we can forget the body altogether or think of it as a useless appendage that hangs off the bottom of our neck. The *tudong* life helps us to remember it. In these extreme conditions the body is being asked to do a lot more than in a so-called average day. Its limitations are thus more apparent, and therefore you cultivate a grateful respect and appreciation of it and its capacities. I would spread *mettā* to all my body parts, especially the lungs and heart, feet and ankles, legs, back and shoulders. To all appearances this seemed to have a good effect, and I remained without injury or illness throughout the entire time of training and right up until the end of the pilgrimage.

Secondly, at altitude in general but while climbing in particular, mindfulness of breathing is inescapable. It thus becomes a wonderfully supportive presence for a continuity of awareness

Thirdly, owing to the shortness of breath, the body is unavoidably present; it is impossible to drift off into some mental abstraction. Yet ironically, the body is simultaneously realized as being totally 'other': as 'impermanent, unsatisfactory ... alien, as dis-

integrating, empty, as not self' (M 64.9). Moment by moment it is made clear that the body is neither owned nor under personal control. Certain habits of sense perception are also revealed because of this. The eye says one thing: 'I can do that. It's hardly any slope at all.' But the heart and lungs tell another story: 'Stop. You stop right here and you breathe as deep as you can. You don't move until there is enough oxygen in the blood once more. No debate.'

Lastly, a realization that is crucial for personal ease and communal harmony is that no one comes first or last in a pilgrimage. Old habits of judging and ranking; notions of: 'Being passed ... keeping up ... who's ahead? Don't want to be



The high pass between Mount Kailash and the Kingdom of Gugé.



Indian pilgrims at Simikot, awaiting their helicopter flight to Mount Kailash.

left behind ...'; these all have their power. If they are believed in they lead to great discontent and *dukkha*; if they are abandoned, everyone benefits.

By the time we reached the start of the circumambulation at the village of Tarchen, all six of our group, Vens. Dhammarakkho and Appamādo, Nick Scott, Chris Smith, Rory Hodd and myself, were as well-adapted to the environment as

possible. Some had been experiencing more difficulty than others (Nick had trouble sleeping and Tan Appamādo had almost continuous migraines while above 13,000 feet), but none of us had altitude sickness or anything more serious.

I felt immensely grateful for all the encouragement received to get ready for living at this height. Acclimatization is for the body like keeping the Precepts is for the mind and heart; it is the source of protection and security in all conditions. Without *sīla* we are vulnerable and likely to cause

ourselves all sorts of harm. In a comparable way we found that many groups of Indian pilgrims, coaxed into the region by unscrupulous tour operators to pay homage to Lord Shiva, but unprepared for its physical demands, suffered greatly from their sudden arrival at more than 15,000 feet by plane and helicopter or coach. We heard from a member of 'Group B' of one such party that four people had died, from various causes that very day in their 'Group A'.



Tarchen was a once a hamlet of Tibetan houses but is now a grungy and dispiriting town, expanding rapidly under the influence of the Chinese government's development of the region for tourism. Huge free-standing billboards by the roadsides proclaim the presence of the holy mountain and advertise fun sightseeing opportunities as if it were a Tibetan Disneyland.

This mixture of wildly contrasting realities, as with the magnificent wonder-inducing presence of Mount Kailash and the sleaze-pit nature of Tarchen, is a theme throughout Tibet: the open barrenness of immense reaches of desert, a thousand shades of brown (umber, cream, rust and slate), with not a



Making offerings to Ven. Khenpo Lobsang Jinpa, at Shri Darghey Ling Monastery.

tree in sight, yet in the temples, dense brocades of poppy-red, emerald, turquoise and sapphire, gold and shining yellows. Similarly, the character of the Tibetan people, nomadic, rough-hewn, centred on the spiritual, while the Chinese government under whose thumb they are held is orderly, humourless and fixated on the worldly. It is a realm of intense disparities.

Both the tour operator, Roger Pfister, whom we had met in Kathmandu, and Ajahn Sucitto in England had described in some detail the series of contemplations traditionally used by Tibetan pilgrims when circling Mount Kailash. These two descriptions did not entirely match each other, but as can be said about all such processes of contemplation, the principal ingredient is more what the contemplators themselves bring to the practice, rather than the details of the method. What I will describe here is the series of reflections that I used as we made our way around the mountain.



Tarchen – This is the southernmost point of the *kora* or pathway around Mount Kailash. The walk from here to the first ‘station’ symbolizes the time before our birth, from the beginningless past through to our coming into the world in this life. The pathway rises gently from the edge of Tarchen. I have to stop and breathe deeply from time to time. After an hour or so I reach the first place to pause. A few of the others of our group, including our Tibetan guide Tashi and our one porter Jigme, are already here. Nick is far behind.

Greeting the Mountain – This spot is the first place on the *kora* from which Mount Kailash itself can be seen. The cairn there is decked with prayer-flags streaming in the steady wind under cool grey skies. As I focus the mind to receive the full sanctity of the moment, on cue a Tibetan lad hauls up on his beribboned and chrome-studded motorbike, girlfriend on the pillion and loud Tibetan music blasting from its on-board PA. My first thought is: ‘How can he come and ruin the moment like this?’ But what makes this more my mountain than his? He takes out a cigarette and lights up, chatting with his girl, who smiles broadly. His

blithe manner suggests he doesn’t even register our presence, let alone ask us: ‘You got a problem?’

What is that animal inside that says ‘My reality is more important than yours?’ The Tibetan family settled nearby doesn’t blink either, but continues bowing to the mountain undisturbed. Theirs is the example to follow.

Gateway to the Valley of the Gods – The path from the place of greeting the mountain leads down a gentle slope and into a broad, level valley. Ahead there are tour buses parked, just beside a small scarp and in front of a red and white *stūpa*. As we draw closer a clutch of young Tibetan men race by on ponies caparisoned in jaunty colours. A hundred or so people mill about the buses, a

mixture of Chinese sightseers come to look at the sky-burial up on top of the nearby plateau, Indian pilgrims negotiating for the ponies, Tibetan folk working to provide all the needful, and then those Tibetan families and us, going through on foot. We are the only Westerners in sight.

This place is called The Gateway to the Valley of the Gods, and it symbolizes the beginning of this current life. The *stūpa* is exceptional as it has an archway through its centre. As one ducks beneath the bell and rings it, this signifies the birth moment. For me in this lifetime, that happened in Kent in 1956, so I rewind my thoughts and picture my mother at Kench Hill Hospital, Tenterden, and a small squalling presence, newly hatched.

We walk on. The long, straight, even surface is walled with endless stories of deities and spiritual warriors, demons battled and defeated, all marked in whorls of rock.

Snow flurries begin, but though I whip out my waterproof to ‘be prepared’, it is plain that for the locals this does not even register as weather. Cowboy-hatted rough-necks slurp pot-noodles with abandon in the rest-stop tent. Turquoise and corals bead their hatbands and *mālās*, as they do the earrings and plaits of the womenfolk.

Dirapuk Monastery – We come to the ancient monastery of Dirapuk, famed for its tiny cave where Guru Rimpoche (Padma Sambhava) once stayed. It’s been a twelve-mile walk from Tarchen; we are weary and glad indeed to be given the finest guest-room to share. The walls are friezed with intricate and colourful strings of lotuses, Dharma wheels and other auspicious symbols; vermilion pillars are tricked out in orange, green and cobalt blue designs with golden flourishes. The grand window looks out onto the north face of Mount Kailash, now obscured by cloud.

The following day is our designated rest-day – fortunately, because the local gods decide to use it to deposit copious rain and snow upon the region. Undaunted, Chris and Rory explore the mountain’s foot and get as close as possible to its walls. Tan Dhammarakkho wanders up a side valley, meeting marmots galore.

The rain and snow pass, and next morning the mountain is revealed in all its glory, wearing the night's white fall and shining brightly. Encouraged by Tashi, Nick sets off before the rest of us at dawn. He knows this will be the longest day for him.

The sky is a perfect blue as I pick my way along the trail. Indian pilgrims in puffy red jackets, some on foot but most on horseback, form a long thread below us and ahead. Yaks bearing barrels pass me by.

The contemplation of this life has reached the present day and now addresses the run-up to the day of death. The slope gets steeper.

Shiva Tsal, the Graveyard of the Siddhas –

This is the northernmost point of the *kora*. The contemplation assigned to this station is belied by the patches of bright colour sprinkled over the rock-field, for this is the place of dying. It represents the death moment of this present life, the time of letting go, whether we wish to or not. This is the place and time for relinquishing.

I can walk only fifteen or twenty paces before having to stop, inhaling in the full-chested way I have developed to increase the intake of air. The splashes of red and blue, the stripes of yellow and pink that decorate the stones are from pieces of clothing, often of loved ones, left here as a gesture of releasing, letting go. Sometimes folk leave something that is more personal to them, perhaps their own pullover, a woollen hat or, more traditionally, some of their own hair or fingernails.

I knew of this place from Ajahn Sucitto's account and had pondered long on what to leave here. Had he still been alive, it would have been my father's hundredth birthday on 30 May, only a few days before.

As a memorial to him, and recognizing his love of the outdoors, my sisters and I decided to offer up his watch and to enshrine it here.

The group has built a small cairn by the time I arrive at the Shiva Tsal. Tan Dhammarakkho has brought with him tiny dresses that belonged to both his daughter Hannah, who died at the age of two, and to Rachel, her elder sister, from that same time. It was almost thirty years ago that Hannah

died in the strange explosion of a car. Chris places his great-grandmother's thimble with these other offerings, and we add a picture of Hannah and one of Luang Por Chah. We chant and share our blessings, letting go of family; leaving it and all the world behind.

Beside me a young couple, gloved and aproned in sturdy leather, take three steps and bow, measuring their length on the rocks (see photo left). They make a beeline up the slope, bowing every third step, ignoring the twists and turns that offer a more gentle rise to the path. Their intent, their faith, shimmer the air around them.

The climb up beyond the place of death represents the journey through the *bardo*. These are the intermediary states that follow the death of the body, wherein we meet

the unpaid debts and residues of former lives, incalculable in number.

I endeavour to meet the present at every step, breathing it in deeply – ever present, ever onward, up to the highest pass. Circling the mountain with devotion expresses the devotion to reality, the *axis mundi* of the here and now.

The bowing couple are much quicker up the slope than I am; they go face down into rock-shards or crusty snow regardless.



Vens. Dhammarakkho and Appamādo at Shipship Pass, also known as Nara Bhanjyang La.

The Dolma La pass – Here is the highest point of the *kora*. The rough stone *stūpas* on the pass are buried in layers of devotion, the five colours of the prayer-flag offerings obliterating the dusty greys of the rock. I sit in the bright sun next to Tashi. Tan Appamādo is cold and ready to move on; Tan Dhammarakkho has already gone. Rory gleefully takes pictures;

Chris ponders, bright eyes open wide; Nick is far below and far behind.

Here is the place of karma's ending. Here, at the highest point and the end of climbing, is the contemplation of life once you have let go of the family, the Horners and the Goldsmiths, the Hayters and the Barratts; let go of past karma and debts to any others. Here is the letting go of being a Theravādin or a Buddhist, a man or a woman, of being a hu-



The Himalayan range, seen from the north, beside the road to eastern Tibet.

man; here is the letting go of past, future and present, and of location. Here is the end of here-ness, the end of all beginnings and endings. This is the centre of the world.

The stretch of the path descending from the Dolma La embodies the contemplation of the 'clear light nature of mind' or *pabhassara citta*, wherein all debts have been paid and all identity, all attachments finished – life with no 'I' and 'mine'. Here is the challenge of fusing practical engagement with utter emptiness.

My feet fly down the hill. Ultimately all things might be equal, but descent is a different universe from ascent. I never pause for breath. Before I know it I am ahead of all the others, my booted feet mercurial, sure-footed.

I follow a local Vajrayogini as a guide down through open rock-fields. Down, ever down to a 'gust'-house with a restaurant. It is just before noon but none of the laymen of our group are here yet, so I assume this will be a day without a meal offering, but to my surprise a young Chinese couple offer me some food, the miraculous unsearched for.

The ground levels out and there is a long easy run on to our resting-place for the night. This is the end of the arena of clear light. Nick makes it in after everyone, after dark. He hit the wall, he tells us, climbing to the pass, but he has come through alive and that's what matters.

Zutulpuk Monastery – Settled on the south-eastern edge of the *kora*, this is another ancient holy site, famous as a place where the yogi Milarepa lived in a small cave.

This station of the circumambulation signifies the conscious re-entry into the world of people and things, a new

birth among beings but with the heart free of delusion. From the classical Theravādin point of view this might be seen as an impossibility, but the contemplative exercise in itself is very useful. In the Pali Canon the Buddha encourages the emulation of the enlightened by simply keeping the Eight Precepts (A 8.41), for 'in this way you will live as the arahants do ... and that will be of great and glorious benefit to you.' So at this point of the *kora* I reflect: 'How would the Buddha live in the world here, responding to this moment as it is?'

It is an easy, levellish run to the south, alongside a shining river. The road is wide and even, and there is an aura of conquest, completion in the air. Unshaven Indian pilgrims ask to have their pictures taken with us, arms thrown with carefree bonhomie round our shoulders; hats are swapped in an abandoned festive sweep. Given the many recent deaths on the *kora*, it is no surprise that a few are drunk on survival.

Back now to the world as if with no residues, with all debts paid. We debouch from the valley to a clutch of stone buildings and find the broad plain opening out before us, as well as some fifty-seater coaches waiting to convey the Indian groups on to their next place.

It's a long dusty road back into Tarchen, under the shadow of the foothills of Mount Kailash, so I tuck in behind our trusty porter Jigme and slip-stream him for the final miles home. For a while the grungy town seems to recede from me like a mirage, ever-retreating like a horizon. Again, ironically, its presence is now appealing, beckoning from afar.

At last even that eerie never-reachingness comes to its end and the circle is completed. We have come back to the world.





Chiu Gomba on the north-western shore of Lake Manasarovar.

Where to go after such a journey and where to direct the attention?

Close to Mount Kailash is the sacred Lake Manasarovar, the Lake Anotatta of the Pali scriptures. It has been mythically paired with Mount Kailash from time immemorial, and miraculously, even the Chinese government respects its traditions, so all boats and fishing are forbidden there.

It possesses a vast, placid and thunderous presence, and is the perfect place to rest after the physical rigours of the *kora*. Our group stayed there for three or four days, at the guest house of Chiu Gomba (The Monastery of the Birds) right at the water's edge – we could easily have stayed for a month.

Still, limitless, bright, Lake Manasarovar embodied the rich roaring silence of *nirodha*. The infinite spaciousness of the lakeshore was the ideal environment in which to digest what had just been experienced; not to put the event into words or

pictures, but rather to let its effects soak through the system.

And at this ending of the pilgrimage, how can those effects be described?

'In my end is my beginning'. Whatever the effects are, they are manifested in the mode of being at each moment, each fresh beginning. It is realized that it is possible to receive the present reality in the heart which is spacious, light and gracious. There is the possibility to be the awakened awareness that is the centre of the world. ❧

'The heart of the universe is your heart.'

Luang Por Sumedho

[Quotations from *Four Quartets* by TS Eliot; *Burnt Norton II*, *East Coker I & V*]



A lone dog along the shores of Lake Manasarovar.



Two Sides of the Coin – reflections on death

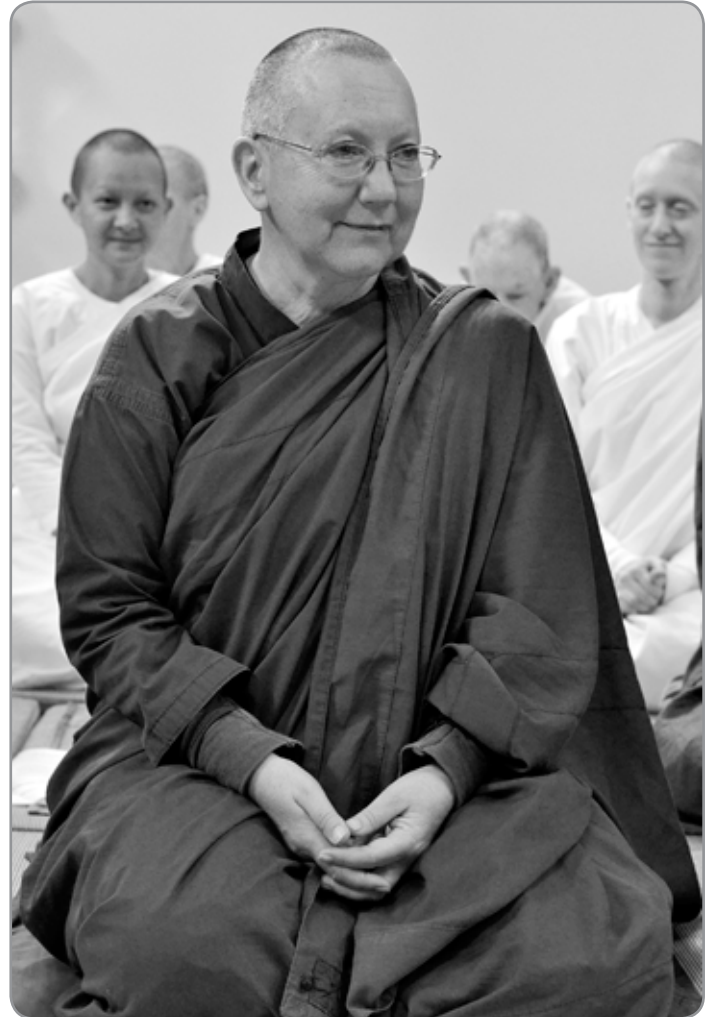
by Ajahn Mettā

SOMETIMES IT SURPRISES ME HOW MANY OF US SEEM TO BE WORKING WITH DEATH, DYING, OR ENDINGS IN A MORE GENERAL SENSE. It is amazing how much these endings are part of what we experience. As we are all human beings, death is part of our lives, in terms of both our own death and the deaths of everyone else around us. What I see is that many of us are working with the grief that arises from losing somebody or something; the grief of an imminent ending. When you directly experience the death of a partner in a relationship (a husband, a friend, a mother or father, for example), the ending of such a connection goes very deep. You might feel as if one aspect of your life is moving away from you into the unknown. How can we relate to that? How can we relate to the inevitability of ending?

One thing that helps me is understanding the fact that in any ending there is already a beginning. Ending isn't just ending, stopping, finishing. Ending implies beginning, and beginning leads to ending. When I reflect in this way, I can visualize a spiral that just starts another round on another level.

I remember a few years ago when a friend of mine was dying. It was a special experience for me. What was beautiful about it was seeing how much she could be at peace with her situation, and how much she could use her practice, the fruits of her practice, to prepare herself for this next step. It was obvious that as she was leaving, she wasn't struggling any more. She had been ill for several years. She was dying of cancer and in the beginning had fought against it. She tried various ways of dealing with her illness, but none of them worked. The people who were with her up until the end told me how she passed on: her life force ended like a soft breath ... fading out, moving on. Sometimes you hear the phrase 'die before you die'. Her life reminded me very much of this. I saw her passing away as a mirror that reflected our own constant endings. In our lives we experience so many of these: a moment, a day, a week, a project, a relationship, a season. If we see them as the dying or ending that occurs before all the life in this body comes to an end, then we can be peaceful with this.

It helps if we can accept that there are beginnings and endings. It prepares us for moving on into something new, something different, into something that we don't know ... yet. And actually we experience this quite a lot in our lives. Often we are just not fully aware of this process. There are those endings that we all know: of a job, a relationship, a situation, the finishing of a project; all endings and beginnings. What ends here begins there, and with something new, something different enters into our lives and we have to say goodbye to what we know, to what is familiar. For example, if we move to a different part of the world, we have to part from our friends and that might not always be so easy.



Ajahn Mettā

That is one aspect of it, but there is also something else: we experience the death of the self many times during our practice. We experience the creation of a sense of self and then its falling apart. Creation and falling apart, coming into existence and ceasing to be. If you look at yourself, at what you take as being yourself, is it the same as yesterday, as a week ago? And what about a year ago? How often does it change? Mine changes quite often, depending on conditions, on the situations I find myself in. Today it has changed at least several hundred times. As there's a sense of self arising, of being this or that, identifying with this or that, this means several hundred deaths in one day. Being born, moving on and dissolving – it happens constantly. But, while we're usually aware of the creation and the moving on, we often miss out on the dissolving bit of it because so often it just fades away. We are not aware of this because we are already busy with the next creation that is arising. Because

the energy of the arising is so strong, it catches our attention so much more than the energy of the soft fading away of present experience. I suggest that sometimes we should focus just on the cessation of self, its dissolving. This can help us to see how ephemeral it is, how unsolid. It can help us to weaken our belief in the self, the belief that it is so special, so constant and so real.

We experience the birth and death of the self many times every day. Although we don't frame it that way, in principle it is the same as – or at least very similar to – one's death at the end of one's life. Coming and going, arising and passing away – and then what? What is left? What moves on? What do we take with us into the next arising? It's not my intention to give you any answers. I want to encourage you to investigate this for yourself. My answers might be different from yours, anyway.

Today I had a conversation with someone about life in Asia and how different it is from life in the West.

One of the things that I like about Asia is that all aspects of life are out in the open and you encounter them all the time. There is not much that is hidden or separated from the rest of life. In India, for example, you can experience directly how close life and death are together. I have often walked down the street and passed a funeral party. Some members of the family will be carrying the dead body

to the funeral pyre. It's nothing special. It's so much a part of ordinary life. Another aspect is poverty, which is right there in front of you. You see people with deformities because they are not tucked away somewhere out of sight; they are part of it all, part of what is going on, and they have their place in it.

How much do we live with this 'tucking away'? Do we include the endings, the uncomfortable and the unknowing? Death is a reality. There is no one here who won't die. We are all brothers and sisters in old age, sickness and death. We're all walking towards this and we do not know when it will strike us. How can we allow ourselves to be more aware of it without feeling threatened by it? When we allow death to be part of our lives now, it loses its frightening aspect. On the other hand, when we deny the presence of something, it only hits us harder when it becomes a reality. If we allow ourselves to reflect on death, it will be part of our life now. And when we eventually come to the point of facing and meeting death, it will not be so foreign or strange any more. It won't be something that 'should not happen to me.' With this way of reflecting, you can say, 'yes, death is part of life', the other side of the coin. Life and death belong together. If there is death there is life, and vice versa. They cannot really be separated. They are one. Two sides of the same coin.

Sooner or later, our physical bodies will die, there is no doubt about this. We are born into these bodies, which manifest for a period of time, grow older and weaker and then at some point die. If we prefer, we can choose to see them as entities or as energy flows. When I contemplate the body in terms of the elements, it helps me to move out of the concept of the body as something solid, something that is just like what it seems. When I accept that the body is composed of the four elements (earth,

water, fire and air), what does that actually mean? It means that the fire element in this body is not different from the fire element in that body. It is not different from the fire element anywhere around us. It's simply the fire element. This can help us to step out of the concept of 'my body', 'your body' and into just 'body', composed of the four elements. When we contemplate our bodies in this way, we can see that as the elements work together, they create a certain form that is in a constant process of change. It's not static, even for those periods of time when our bodies look quite familiar to us. When you are ten years old, your body has certain features which for a while appear to be the same. And then a few years down the line, it all looks quite different. When you are twenty, it looks different from that. When you are forty, it looks different again, and so on. It's constantly changing. Even though we may not acknowledge this

... in any ending there is already a beginning. Ending isn't just ending, stopping, finishing. Ending implies beginning, and beginning leads to ending.

constant change or be able to comprehend it, over the years we do indeed begin to recognize the differences and changes that the body goes through. If I look back at my body when it was ten years old, where is that body now? Is this still that body? When we start looking at the body in this way, it gives us the opportunity to see the impermanence of life unfolding. This does not mean that the body of the ten-year-old never existed. It was once there, but it has

come and gone. This is what life is about.

When we are close to somebody who is in the process of dying, it is natural to feel grief and sadness. We feel a response to the imminent end of their time with us. But if we have been reflecting on endings, if we have been preparing ourselves in this way, we know that dying is just a moving on. It's not a complete ending, but simply another change. And we usually don't like changes. We find them difficult, especially if they are unexpected.

Something interesting happens when I see the body of somebody I know who has died. It seems that it is not that person any more. A while ago I had an experience of this kind. Somebody who had lived with us in the monastery for many years died. Most of us spent some time sitting with the body in the coffin while it was in one of our meditation halls. It was very moving to see the changes that it went through over the ten days or so that it was there. I felt it was less and less the person I knew, as if it had become something more impersonal, just another corpse. While I was sitting with it I felt peaceful, and I hoped that our being with the body helped him to move on, that it supported his moving in the right direction. It's difficult to put this into words, but it was something like that. And yet it wasn't the person I knew any more who was in that coffin. It was a corpse and that is very different.

When the time came for the funeral ceremony, almost everybody living in the monastery was there. Many friends of his came and joined us as well. He had been very much liked. Sometimes he would leave the monastery to do some work with his friends. So these friends and also some of his family came for the funeral, and we shared our memories of the experiences we'd had with him. When we did this, he was suddenly there.

(Continued on page 41)

Realizing the Vision – by Ajahn Amaro



I F YOU ENTER THE SALA AT AMARAVATI THESE DAYS YOU WILL FIND A LITTLE DISPLAY IN THE CORNER OF THE LOBBY. THERE IS A THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF THE SITE as it might look in 2045, and boards describing the history and present condition of, and future possibilities for, the monastery's physical structure. The proposed building plans have been carefully developed over the past two years by a dedicated team of people made up of Sangha members, lay residents and experts from outside the monastery.

Where it Began

Ever since the Sangha first moved into the buildings of the newly closed-down St Margarets School in 1984, in order to found a monastery and centre of Buddhist teaching, earnest and energetic discussion about the long-term usability of the existing structures has been going on. We were often told that 'anyone in their right mind', e.g. a property developer, would have simply bulldozed the lot and then built a housing estate or whatever else they wanted on the open land. But as the English Sangha Trust had stretched its resources to the limit to acquire the site, the only option we had was to patch and repair the buildings that were there and make do with what we had for the time being. What we had was pretty rough. The school's administrators had known it would one day need to

be closed because of falling populations of children, so for the previous seven years no maintenance had been done. Windows were cracked, 95% of the site had no insulation and the whole campus of twenty-two buildings had been heated by a massively wasteful half-mile-long hot-water system that was powered by two oil-fired boilers. Once the expense of running these behemoths was apparent, they were summarily switched off.

Since that time we have carried out a continuous programme of repair and maintenance, including insulation, replacement of windows, painting and landscaping. Most significantly, in 1999 the construction of the Temple and cloister was completed. The Temple has given the monastery a true physical heart. Its arising completely changed the ambience of the place. But now, nearly thirty years after the community arrived here, the basic fabric and positioning of the remaining buildings are still as they were when the site was originally constructed. While they provide for the general activities of the monastic and lay Buddhist communities, the buildings were designed and built for an altogether different purpose. Originally the place was constructed in 1939 to be a summer camp for children. Immediately on completion, owing to the outbreak of the Second World War, it was used to house evacuees from London. When the war ended the site was converted to be used as a school.

Last year during a retreat, an aged man with a walking stick

tottered into the lounge of the women's accommodation block in the Retreat Centre. 'Can we help you?' one of the retreatants politely enquired. 'I was 'ere in the war when I was a nipper', he replied. 'I was in the area, so I thought I'd come and take a look at the old place ...' The women retreatants quickly adopted him and began to lead him on an impromptu tour. As they passed through the dormitory our visitor paused and looked around, 'Asn't changed much ...'

That was a telling remark, for indeed, it has not changed that much in seventy-four years. The vast majority of the buildings are the original Canadian cedar huts, up on piers and open to the winds of Hertfordshire underneath. An energy survey we had done a few years ago revealed that Amaravati uses almost a Megawatt of power per year for heat and light, even though we try to be as abstemious as possible. Apparently that is the same amount as used by a village of 400-500 houses built to modern standards; the site is thus very energy-hungry and wasteful.

In addition, compromises are made on a regular basis in respect to the use of buildings and what happens where on the Amaravati site. For example, the workshop is currently situated right beside both the Temple and the Retreat Centre. Ever since the monastery's earliest years there has been an idea of moving it, particularly because of all the machine noise; but then, where to? Similarly, the long thin shape of the Retreat Centre shrine room has continually proved problematic; if you have the shrine at one end, those at the back are way off in the distance, and if you have it half-way along (as it is at present), the person leading the retreat experiences 'Wimbledon neck' from continually having to turn the head through 180° to address all the retreatants. Then there are the corridors of the Monks' Vihāra; they are magnificent echo chambers, so each bhikkhu in his room becomes very aware of the comings and goings of all his brothers. And so on.

A Master Plan for Improving the Site

The cost of insuring, maintaining, repairing and providing energy for the buildings has spiralled in the last ten to fifteen years.

Energy use and costs could be significantly reduced if the site were to be regenerated using modern methods of construction. Having considered this and the impractical nature of many of

the buildings at present, the Amaravati community feels that in order to continue its way of life and services to the broader Buddhist population on this site, without the burden of escalating maintenance and repair costs to buildings which are close to or past their sell-by date, a programme of phased regeneration is the logical way forward. Timber and some other materials will be saved for reuse in the new buildings where it is practical.

Over the last eighteen months or so we, along with a professional team, have been developing a master plan for the whole site, rather than taking a piecemeal approach to the process of regeneration. This master plan can then be implemented in phases, and will over time provide a site more suited to the way of life of the monastic community and the needs of the resident and visiting laity, all taking place in a sustainable and energy-efficient environment.

The overall aim of the master plan is to create a highly environmentally-friendly eco-village and as far as possible aim to become self sufficient in relation to the community's electricity requirements. The plan does not involve intensifying the existing use of the site, as the number of bed-spaces will remain broadly the same, but there will be a bit more space for all the activities that already take place here. With respect to these objectives, we aim for the plan to be implemented incrementally over approximately the next thirty years. This length of time is envisaged for several reasons: firstly, to cause as little disruption as possible to the neighbourhood; secondly, to fit in with the routines and lifestyle of the resident monastic and lay com-

munities; lastly, to match the flow of donations for each of the individual elements of the plan, since the English Sangha Trust has a policy of not going into debt, and there is a very significant need not to overstretch the goodhearted generosity of lay supporters. This is a long-term project and is seen as serving the needs of the whole Buddhist community – and indeed all those who, regardless of background or creed, are in need of



Above: Visitors on the Open Day in July meet with project leaders and discuss the new master plan; below: an image from the original Amaravati Temple in India.





spiritual resources or guidance in meditation – so it is important that it should not become burdensome in any way. Buddhism is about ending suffering, not increasing it, so any development will be contingent on funds for it becoming freely available.

Lastly, in the master plan, the design of the proposed buildings will be sensitive to Amaravati’s location in an area of outstanding natural beauty within the Chiltern Hills, respecting its views and setting, and the local building materials; their design will also respect the Temple and the cloister, which will be retained as the heart of the monastery.

Beginning Construction

Following a number of meetings with officers at Dacorum Council during early 2013, the master plan was completed and submitted to the Council for review in October 2013. In February 2014 the Council intends issuing their ‘Site Allocations Development Plan Document’ for public consultation as part of the Local Development Framework process and the Amaravati master plan document is expected to form part of that consultation. The law of uncertainty makes it impossible to predict exactly when we might be able to start implementing the plan; however we hope to begin making detailed drawings for the first developments and making our initial planning application in 2014.

The very first item we intend to construct will be a ‘nursing *kuṭī*’ in the monks’ area. This is specifically in order to have suitable accommodation ready should Luang Por Sumedho wish to stay here at any time, and also to have a place prepared for him should he require refined medical care in the future. As part of this construction we plan to develop the section of the driveway from the monastery gate to where the nursing *kuṭī* will be located; this will both assist its construction and also provide the opportunity to lay the required infrastructure relating to the prospective new Monks’ Vihāra, the accommodation for long term male managers and possibly for the proposed

new Bodhi House. This will be the first phase of construction in the implementation of the Amaravati Long-Term Plan.

The second phase of construction, which will only begin once the first phase has been completed, will probably include removing the old workshop, building the ‘Amarakuṭī’ for the resident senior nun, the lay women’s guest accommodation and redeveloping the service yard behind the Sala as the new workshop area.

The Future

In the lobby of the Amaravati Sala a statue of Sri Ariya Maitreya, the next predicted Buddha, sits gazing contemplatively over the model of Amaravati in its future form (see photo left). According to the legends, Maitreya Buddha is not due to appear in the world for about another 2500 years, and even by the most optimistic estimates it is unlikely that the new buildings will last that long. However, it is hoped that they will serve for at least a few hundred years, and thus provide a supportive environment, a sturdy cradle, for the Buddha’s dispensation to grow and flourish in this green and pleasant land. ☸



If you would like more information on the proposals, please get in touch with our planning consultant, Kate Fleming, at Rolfe Judd Planning: katef@rolfe-judd.co.uk

Or if you visit Amaravati, please speak with Ajahn Amaro or Caroline Leinster, the Secretary of the English Sangha Trust.

If you would like to support this project either financially or in any other way, please contact Caroline Leinster and let her know of your interest.



It's a Sign



IT'S A SIGN. BODHINYANARAMA'S ENTRANCE HAS A NEW LOOK. WITH THE LETTERING RE-GILDED AND ITS BORDER COLOURED THE SIGN GLOWS FRESH in the afternoon sun.

Just inside the gate the newly asphalted surface of the driveway and car park glistens with a shiny black sheen. A few Kathina flags still flutter gently in the breeze along the approach to the Sala. Ajahn Kalyāno and three monks from Australia, Ajahn Chandako from Auckland, plus four local monks were with us for our Kathina celebration. Connection with the Asian-Australasian monasteries is appreciated and it is hoped this will develop further over the years. Our Sangha of four has grown with Ajahn Ariyasīlo arriving a few days ago and Tan Kusalacitto arriving yesterday from Thailand. Six monks of six nationalities. Quite a mix. We have one long-term lay resident with another returning in the New Year and yet another pondering the monastic possibility.

With spring quite well settled the forest is lush and green. A recent agreement with the local council saw another fifteen acres of bush added to our holding, not only further buffering our boundary but giving a much more logical shape to the property. We are more clearly defining areas of residence, with three distinct zones: lay, monastic and hermitage. Two new lay *kuṭīs* should be ready for next *Vassa*, with access to the hermitage formed. The plan is to

wait and be sure that Sangha numbers are relatively stable before investing in *kuṭīs* for the hermitage. There is already one in regular use.

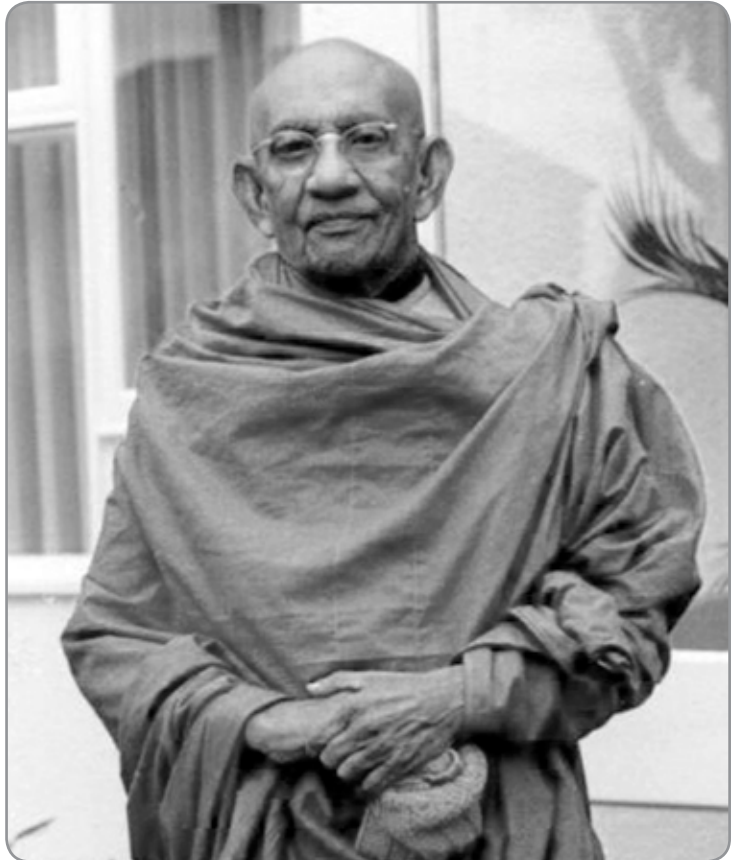
A larger Sangha brings the range of Dhamma offerings to the wider lay community under review. Talks, observance days, retreats and workshops are all well attended by a good mix of regular devotees and those here for the first time. The advent of warmer weather sees an increasing number of visitors, with overseas and local people taking advantage of the opportunity to live here for a period. As the lay residence is developed there will be more space for people to do short to medium self-retreats. Ajahn Chah's invocation to 'read the book of the heart' brings a good balance to the welter of Dhamma information that is so available these days. An emphasis on silence, solitude and simplicity will naturally bring this data into focus. Understanding comes through investigation and direct experience. The strong and steady natural presence of the forest provides a peaceful dwelling place. The teaching of the Buddha provides the furnishing. The welcome sign is out. All we need to do is enter. ☸

Ajahn Kusalo

A MEMORIAL STŪPA HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED ON THE SITE OF THE SĪMĀ THAT THE VEN. ANANDA MAITREYA MAHANAYAKA¹ THERA HAD CONSECRATED ON 3 JULY 1981. A *sīmā* is an essential foundation – it defines a territory within which formal acts of the Sangha (*saṅghakamma*) can be carried out, the most important of which is the *upasampadā*, or Admission into the Bhikkhu Sangha. Until then no *sīmā* had been laid down in the UK, and would-be bhikkhus had been required to seek Admission in Asia, or on temporary *sīmās*. Ven. Ananda Maitreya was very experienced in establishing *sīmās*, and having become acquainted with and taken an interest in the fledgling Sangha at Cittaviveka, he agreed to create one on the lawn to the west side of the main house in the monastery. This he accomplished in the traditional way, instructing the resident Sangha in the proper procedure to do so.

This was a very welcome event, as the abbot, Ven. Ajahn Sumedho, had just received permission to become a Preceptor (*Upajjhāya*), the person who is needed to officiate over the Admission. With the *sīmā* properly set up, the first Bhikkhu *Upasampadā* was able to take place in that same month. From that day and for over two decades, the Ananda Maitreya Sīmā was the principal place for Admissions to take place. This *sīmā* was also the site of the first Going Forth (*Pabbajjā*) for women in the West. The first four candidates took this step in 1983 under Ven. Ajahn Sumedho, and many have followed suit over the years.

During the years 1981-84 Ven. Ananda Maitreya visited



Ven. Ananda Maitreya



Cittaviveka on several occasions to offer Dhamma instruction or lessons in the Pali language. In 1984 Amaravati Buddhist Monastery opened and Ven. Ajahn Sumedho and many Sangha members went to live there. Ven. Ananda Maitreya spent that *Vassa* at Amaravati teaching Pali and Abhidhamma philosophy to the Sangha.

The *sīmā*'s role was limited in that, as it was in the open-air, it could only be used in mild, dry weather. For year-round *saṅghakamma* functions, such as the fortnightly *Pātimokkha* recitation, an indoor *sīmā* was needed. So the Sangha decided to create a new *sīmā* inside the Dhamma Hall. This meant that the old *sīmā* had to be decommissioned, and the work began in Autumn 2012. The garden was extended to encircle the *sīmā* within which the *stūpa* was to be established; the ground was mapped out and building materials collected. The first stage was the construction of the plinth, in which the original commemorative stone was set with the phrase chosen by Ven. Ananda Maitreya: '*Vinayo Sāsanassa Āyu*'. This can be translated as 'Vinaya discipline is for the longevity of the Way'. He especially wanted to emphasize the value of this discipline, which he saw being carried out at Cittaviveka.

¹ Mahanayaka: chief or head monk of a particular Order or sect of a Sangha in the Theravada tradition.



Ajahn Sucitto and Raja install the casket containing suttas, relics and bodhi leaves.

Raja, a friend and long-term lay supporter of Cittaviveka, generously offered to oversee the creation of the new *stūpa*. He studied *stūpa* design and construction, and with no previous experience, worked through the winter to create the *stūpa* in the monastery workshop. Meanwhile, members of the Sangha had inscribed Pali texts on copper plates and gathered relics and bodhi leaves to place inside the main chamber of the *stūpa*. The Pali texts included the Dhammacakkappavattana, Ratana, Mettā and Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas, Paṭiccasamuppāda, Khandha Paritta, Sivali Gatha, and the four-line teaching given to Ven. Sāriputta by Ven. Assaji:

ye dhammā hetuppabhavā

Whatever things arise from a cause,

tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha

the Tathāgata has explained that cause

tesañca yo nirodho

and what their cessation is:

evaṃ vādī mahā samaṇo

Thus teaches the Great Contemplative.

The copper plates, relics and bodhi leaves were placed in a brass reliquary that was set on top of the plinth on 12 April. Sealed to prevent water entering the chamber, these relics will remain enshrined for the foreseeable future. The *stūpa* is of the style used at Anuradhapura, the capital city during the great era of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Finally, paving stones were set in the ground around the *stūpa* so that offerings could be made at its base. After this, the next step was to perform a consecration of the *stūpa* during which the Sangha and the lay community could offer their respects and blessings. Another set of relics was offered to fit into

the upper chamber, immediately beneath the spire. These came from the collection of the Sangharaja of Thailand, and were surrounded by more suttas inscribed on copper plate.

The Sangha from the London Buddhist Vihāra was invited to attend the consecration, and Ven. Bogoda Seelavimala, the present Mahanayaka of Great Britain, agreed to attend and preside over the ceremony. The date of 18 July 2013 was chosen to coincide with Ven. Ananda Maitreya's death anniversary. Members of our extended community, notably Ajahn Amaro, the current Preceptor and abbot of Amaravati, and Ajahn Jutindharo, abbot of Hartridge, as well as senior monks from other Sri Lankan *vihāras* in UK, also came to pay their respects and give their blessings. After taking the Refuge and Precepts, members of the lay community made offerings and paid their respects. The Sangha Assembly recited the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha's First Sermon, as a blessing for the *stūpa*, the occasion, and in memory of Ven. Ananda Maitreya.

The relics for the upper chamber having been blessed, the casket was sealed and made ready to be installed. The spire was then put in place and capped. The ceremony was concluded with a circumambulation of the *stūpa* by the entire Assembly (see cover photo), chanting the Homage to the Three Symbols of Veneration:

vandāmi cetiyaṃ sabbaṃ

All the *stūpas* in every place,

sabbaṭṭhānesu paṭiṭṭhitam

wherever they are found,

sārīrikadhātu mahābodhiṃ

the bodily relics, the great Bodhi tree,

buddharūpaṃ sakalaṃ sadā

and Buddha images I revere.

Ajahn Gavesako



Ven. Bogoda Seelavimala of London Buddhist Vihāra.



A Heart Oriented Towards the Dhamma

WITH THE ENDING OF 2013, TWENTY-FIVE YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF DHAMMAPALA MONASTERY IN 1988, in a place named Konolfingen near Bern. This past year came and went in the blink of an eye, like hardly any other previously. Likewise, the events and impressions in the context of the monastery have evaporated as do the misty clouds in our valley in the warmth of the morning sun. The perception of time is of course a very subjective one. Personally I have the sense that, with increasing age, the passing months and years are simply dissolving into thin air. At a superficial glance that perception leaves a flat and sobering feeling in the heart, often connected with the question: where has it all gone? All the encounters, relationships and situations of a whole year – all these days, weeks and months? What remains of this? Thankfully, with a heart oriented towards the Dhamma, such thoughts can't settle for very long within the mind, but are rather considered as grist for the contemplative mill. A lifestyle dedicated to the letting go of *all* conditioned phenomena has the advantage that one is constantly aware of the tendency to cling to past experiences, and the need to loosen the grip on that which has already become part of history.

The blessings of the Refuges and Precepts

Recent blessing ceremonies at Dhammapala involved the children of two long-standing guests of the monastery. During two coherent and inspiring ceremonies, the beneficial aspects of such events were highlighted for everyone to see. On the

one hand it was the establishing of a live connection – for the whole family – with an existing monastic community; traditionally the Sangha as a 'field of blessings' and as a representative of the third Refuge. On the other hand it consisted of the willingness of the parents at the beginning of the ceremony to commit themselves to the Threefold Refuge and to the Five Precepts. These all together constitute an invisible and invaluable aid to the orientation of the child. This can also evolve to become visible – even very visible – in the long run, expressed through the skilled daily behaviour of the parents. The child can then naturally align itself consciously, as well as unconsciously, in accordance with such good examples. In addition, if the parents possess a true love for the Dhamma, such a family environment should be even more beneficial for the maturing process of the growing children.

Dāna – a heart full of generosity

For the fourth year in a row we received a considerable book delivery as well as one thousand calendars. The Kataññutā Group in Malaysia and Singapore made the generous offer to our global monastic community to print various Dhamma books from teachers of the Forest Sangha annually for five years, and to have them all shipped across the oceans to Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. These books are then on display within each monastery, and can be taken away by any visitor free of charge.

I repeatedly encounter astonished looks on the faces of people to whom it has maybe been pointed out for the



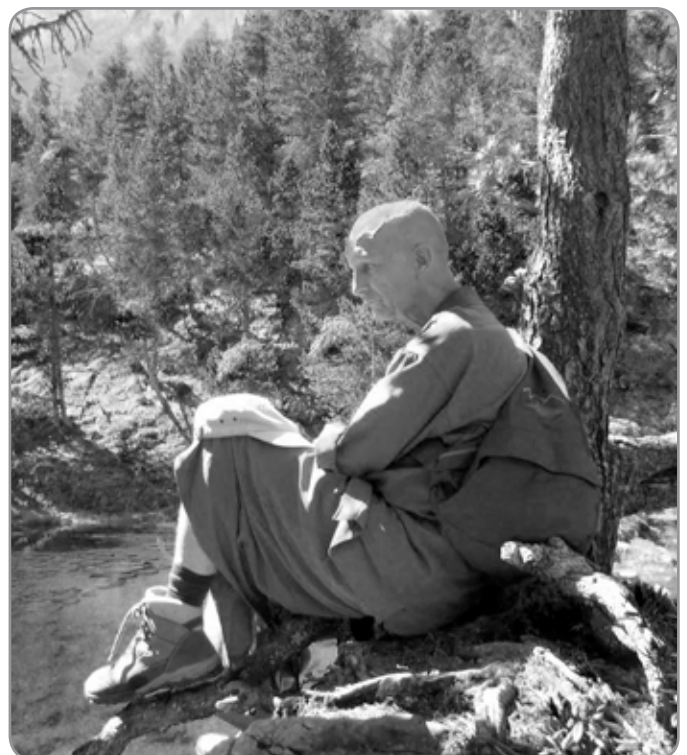
Opposite page: a bird's-eye view of Dhammapala; above: a young visitor to the monastery connecting with the Buddha; below right: Ajahn Khemasiri appreciating a day out in nature.

first time that all the displayed Dhamma books are for free distribution. Often there is the general notion that what is 'for free' can't possibly be very valuable, or that at the very best the literature available contains some kind of missionary content. Maybe the word 'gratis' comes closest to the spirit behind it, in particular if one envisions its etymological root. Gratis is derived from the Latin *gratia* (gratitude) and simply means: 'for the mere thanks'. Within our context behind this lies the idea that a gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts, and that the donors are glad for the opportunity to be able to make such gestures of generosity. They neither expect a reward nor any other advantages or privileges, but take great delight in the act of giving as such. The appropriate response to such deeds finds its expression daily within the monastery in the form of the so called '*anumodanā*' recitation. In it, appreciation for the generosity is expressed and the advantages of a big heart are elevated. Within the Western world, quite naturally an aspect of thankfulness comes in on such occasions, because it is customary and appropriate in our culture to give thanks for gifts received. During a similar encounter with monks or nuns in Asian countries, one usually refrains from the words 'thank you', however beautiful they might sound to our European ears. According to Buddhist teachings, the highest value of giving is activated if one doesn't expect

anything in return; the noble deed becomes therefore 'pure'. The act should not be contaminated even by the most subtle response or expectation. This is why the daily early morning alms-round of the monks in Theravādin countries is conducted in such a composed and silent manner. Not even a grateful glance or an appreciative nod of the head is to be expected. Despite all that – or better, because of that – a quiet joyousness arises amongst everyone involved, both for the giver and for the receiver. A free translation of the term *anumodanā* expresses the state of mind of the alms mendicants during such situations very aptly: 'We rejoice in the joy of those who enjoy the joy of giving.'

Generosity represents the emotional binding agent in every community, in every relationship between even just two people. In some Asian cultures, especially those who have integrated Dhamma values, generous conduct is practised daily from early on. Small children are taught, for example, to place some small offering into the alms-bowls of the monks. One is ready to assist the young donor when sometimes the small fist has some difficulty in opening up. They don't quite understand the background of this small morning ritual, but intuit that something very valuable is happening because the adults demonstrate respect and offer praise when finally the hand is opening to give. In this way, wholesome seeds are planted within the psyche of the small personality. One learns early on that giving is connected with joy and mustn't necessarily hurt. As a consequence of this initially mere ritual act, a wholesome habit can evolve. This habit will become part of the subsequent character structure, and represents very good prerequisites so that all the other wholesome virtues and practices, recommended by the Buddha, can blossom and eventually bear fruit. ☸

Ajahn Khemasiri





Ajahn Nārado and Ven. Anālayo out 'Tudong-ing' the South West Coast Path.

THROUGHOUT THE FINE SUMMER HARTRIDGE MONASTERY HEARD THE STEADY HAMMERING OF NAILS AND HUM OF MACHINERY, and welcomed the comings and goings of many people who came to help; some skilled at building work, others not, but able to assist and contribute wonderfully nonetheless. A new workshop building has come into being, the first stage of the Dhamma Hall project, and was due for completion in the late autumn. Many people have given of their best to help 'on the tools', and the heart opens in gratitude.

For all members of the community, both those in robes and not, there is the pleasure of discovering a different way of being in community created by physical work. Under sun hats and stripped to saffron T-shirts(!) bhikkhus don't look that different from laypeople, and, building work not being what most monks usually do, we have often taken subordinate positions to the more skilled builders. One effect is that assump-



The hemp-laden fruits of a summer well spent! The walls of the workshop are made from hemp and lime – a greener approach to construction.



Ajahn Jutindharo, Ven Suvaco and Mouse survey the beginnings of the construction of the new workshop.

tions about how relationships between monks and laypeople are begin to blur and dissolve. Also, one sees how Dhamma teaching manifests, whether it is through the sound of hammer on nail, or the study of sutta texts.

So what we think of as the normal monastery relationship of a 'hierarchy among equals' starts to play out in different and unfamiliar ways. Who is in charge here? Who knows what they are doing? Is there a plan? Good questions to ask, both on our meditation cushions and on a building-site, because conversations and enquiry around these kinds of questions run on as much inside our heads as in the physical world and monastic grounds outside. This is natural, because generating the space that supports spiritual practice takes time, and to begin with we don't know how to answer them.

Hartridge ... (Continued from page 40)

In fact, we truly don't know, and in community – whether the community is inside our heads as we listen to our many 'selves' talking, or in daily life – it takes the accumulation of a number of conversations, and the silences in between them, before we gradually find the answers to our questions. It takes time and practice on the path. Slowly the fog of confusion begins to clear, and the space begins to separate according to the seeds of intention and aspiration. This building needs to go here and look like this – we agree; and there is a final conversation, a resolution or insight, when what we have been trying to do all along at last emerges.

And then we walk on! One day the Hartridge Dhamma Hall will be fully built (we aim to start the main phase in Spring 2014), and then future visitors will come and some will say to themselves, 'Oh, the builders obviously knew exactly what they were doing here.' But we know better, don't we?

Sangha News – We were three bhikkhus for last winter and Vassa, and as well as Sumitta we were joined by Pete Hooker for the winter and Jim Marshall for three months over the summer. Ven. Anālayo was due to return to Chithurst in early November; we're going to miss his energy and enthusiasm. And Sumitta will also make a visit to Thailand in November, so we are fortunate that two other long-time friends, Michelle and Arzu, have come to stay over the winter. Sadly, though, Poppy (the dog) is no longer with us. She faded out peacefully at the start of July, aged fourteen and a half. ☸

Kindness ... (Continued from page 15)

itself, I could pick it up and develop it more consciously. Only then did what I had tried to do before become possible; only then did my attention become able to settle into the body, and it did so in a very soft and peaceful way. And once that happened I finally started to have a sense of the spacious awareness which was receiving whatever might come up. The natural intelligence inherent in unobstructed awareness could start to manifest ideas about how to respond to the difficulties from a clearer, more peaceful perspective. Although there still didn't seem to be solutions, I was able to stop worrying, to stop trying to force solutions into existence. This proved to be a different way to come into that space of insight, just to abide in awareness and allow the natural intelligence of awareness to operate, with its clarity, its non-judgemental knowing and appreciation of our experience. Those two, knowing and appreciation, must always come together. No matter from which end we start, we have to bring the knowing, seeing, more analytical aspect of the mind together with the feeling quality of the heart.

I hope these reflections may serve as an encouragement to explore the value of consciously paying attention to kindness in our formal meditation, however you want to do that – whether you decide to pay conscious attention to it at the beginning of your meditation, or try to remember and attend to it throughout whatever else you are doing in your practice – whichever way it works for you. ☸

Two Sides of the Coin ... (Continued from page 31)

It felt as if he was there among us. We could feel his presence in the room, and it was as if his particular sense of humour, his joy and his gentleness were back with us, even though during the last two years of his life he had been depressed and troubled. And yes, a little of that was there too, but more than this were his vibrancy and aliveness, his presence. They were with us at that time in the room. When that happened, I had a very strong sense of what a mystery death really is and how little we know about it. How was it that when I looked at that dead body, which for so many years I had known as 'this person', there was nothing really left of what I recognized as 'him'? And yet when I share my memories of this person, when I think about him, when I go to places that he liked, I experience his presence, as if I can feel the energy of this person there. When we are with a living body, we can feel the energy that keeps that body alive, but when this energy moves out of the body, only the body is left and it is just another thing. Where, then, does this energy move on to? What is the direct experience of being alive? What is dying all about?

How can we understand this process of rebirth? In our tradition, we sometimes compare the movement from one existence into another to the flame of one candle being used to light another. When you light a candle with another one, is it the same flame? Maybe. Or maybe not. I find this a useful metaphor which helps to show what this change is about. This moving on, passing through, makes sense to me. Energy has passed through an unimaginable number of bodies and existences. It has just passed through all of them and even now, in this body, it's in constant movement, going through its changes of arising and passing away. I wish that I could reach a point where I am completely at ease with this, where there's no longer any distress coming up in the mind about the fact of dying. I'm not there yet. There's more work to be done, and I feel it's important to find a way to make contact with this and to develop a deeper awareness of these changes, of these endings. With all beginnings we are necessarily moving towards the inevitability of endings. In a way it's so natural, and yet when there is ending, most of the time there is still sadness.

To step into the unknown, willing to let go, to let it be, to let it happen – are we ready to look in this direction? ☸

Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery

Draughtsperson Needed

A draughtsperson is needed to help with drawings for a planning application concerning a small building project at the monastery. If you are interested, please contact the monastery at sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk or ring 01661 881612.



ANOTHER YEAR HAS GONE BY WITH ITS USUAL RHYTHM OF COMINGS AND GOINGS, EVENTS AND RETREATS, busy and quiet times. Since last year the resident community has grown. Anagārika Alberto, originally from Madrid, became our first Spanish novice after more than a year here as an anagārika and is now known as Sāmaṇera Nandasīlo. Three young men joined as anagārikas; one is Sri Lankan but has spent much of the last twenty years in Italy, while the other two are Italian. We continue to receive enquiries from potential candidates, while in the meantime the monastery has practically reached its full capacity.

Santacittarama is also becoming ever more popular amongst laypeople, and for much of the time the guest accommodation is fully booked. We also receive more invitations to teach than we are able to accept. Senior monks regularly visit many places up and down the country, such as Sicily, Sardinia, Puglia, Rome, Tuscany, Brescia, Lake Garda, Piacenza, Valle d'Aosta. We have a very large parish!



There are also wonderful opportunities for monks to have solitary retreats in beautiful natural surroundings. Ajahn Chandapālo marked his twentieth year in Italy by spending the *Vassa* in a mountain hermitage situated towards the north-west corner of the country, just a short distance from Monte Rosa, one of the highest mountains in the Alps. An old stone cowherders' cottage at 2,000 metres above sea level has been made available for Sangha use after extensive renovations, and is very generously supported by several families living in the area.

After about fifteen years of patient endeavour it seems as though we are finally going to be allowed to build a proper meeting hall, to replace the tent we have been making do with all these years! What is planned is a two-storey structure, with the upper part being a Dhamma/meditation hall of about fifteen metres square, directly



accessible at ground level, while below there will be a reception room, library, bathrooms, storage and a small apartment probably for visiting or elderly monks. Perhaps by the time you are reading this there will be plans and drawings of it on our website, and if all goes smoothly, work should be well under way by the time the next newsletter arrives.☸

Above left: the *Pabbajjā* (novice 'Going Forth') ceremony for Sāmaṇera Nandasīlo, taking place in the tent 'Dhamma Hall'; above: Santaloka Hermitage, where Ajahn Chandapālo spent the 2013 *Vassa* (Rains Retreat); left: Ajahn Mahapañño and Ven. Aruṇo witness and support the *Pabbajjā* ceremony.

FOUR BHIKKHUS AND ONE ANAGĀRIKA ENTERED THE VASSA IN THE QUINTA DO PINHAL. THIS IS A PROPERTY OF ABOUT ONE AND A HALF HECTARES in a little village whose Portuguese name is Pinhal de Frades, which means ‘the pine tree grove of the friars’. From the upper rooms facing west we can just see the sea about four kilometres away. From an especially built platform in the grounds one can see the National Palace in Mafra, about five kilometres to the east, the sierra of Sintra, about twenty-five kilometres away and the Atlantic Ocean.

The property is on Estradas Nacionais 116, has houses all around and is three kilometres from the end of the Autoestrada 21, which connects with one of the main motorways, Autoestrada 8, which runs between Lisbon and Porto. It is about thirty-five minutes by car from Lisbon Airport. It is also on the bus route from Lisbon to Ericeira and there is a bus stop about one hundred metres away.

The Quinta do Pinhal is also less than two kilometres from ten hectares of woodland near Fonte Boa do Nabos, a small hamlet a little closer to Ericeira. That land is much quieter than where we are now and it could be a very good site for a monastery. Luang Por Sumedho has seen this land and so have some other senior bhikkhus. If causes and conditions support, it could be purchased. If not, then somewhere else may be found for the longer term.

The community moved from Lisbon in April. We thought that somewhere more rural but still accessible to Lisbon would be better



The *dāna* (meal) hall in the new *vihāra*.

for the bhikkhus, and also give more room for visitors. The property has been rented to us at a low rent on the condition that we take good care of it and that all repairs and work are paid for by the Trust. This gives opportunities for people to come and help with the work which needs to be done. For the medium term, say two or three years, this is sufficient.

We have continued with the morning and evening *pūjā*. The *pūjās* include the chanting of the Karāṇiya Mettā Sutta in Pali, and the translation of the sutta into Portuguese. The chant in Portuguese is popular. We are also hosting regular meditation workshops.



Ven. Kāñcano and Ven. Appamādo on *pindapāta* (alms-round) in Ericeira.

And people are coming to visit. Overnight visitors stay in the guest accommodation, a small cottage on the property which has two bedrooms, a small sitting-room and tiny kitchen tacked on next to the bathroom. When the weather has been good, as it was for much of the summer, people have camped in tents.

Walking on *pindapāta* (alms-round) to the nearest town, Ericeira takes good forty-five minutes, which is further than where we went in Lisbon to the market ten minutes away. There are a couple of routes to the town, one quiet and one along the main road. Both have spectacular views of the ocean as one approaches the town, if the weather is kind. The local people remain generous to and accepting of religious people from a religion which is different from the one they are used to, but still recognizably ‘religious.’ We seldom return with empty bowls.

Much work has been done to translate books on the Dhamma into Portuguese. I think that there are eight titles available with 2,000 copies on the way, and one with 3,000 copies, as well as the calendar in Portuguese. Also, many people in Portugal are comfortable reading English. This year more publications will come here to Portugal than will go to Amaravati. It will be interesting to see how well they are appreciated. I am told that downloads of the ebooks in Portuguese available on the Internet are popular, but those downloads are mainly from Brazil.

I am surprised that things are going so well. Often I am asked, ‘Why Portugal?’ People do not seem to expect that it will be a suitable place to live as a bhikkhu. The short answer is that Luang Por Sumedho attracted enough attention in Portugal to encourage two bhikkhus to begin their training with him, and also for a few laypeople to be committed to supporting a monastery in the country. Another Portuguese man began his training as a bhikkhu in Thailand, but he is now based in Europe, some of the time in Switzerland and some of the time with us in Portugal. I think it will be possible for a small monastery in Portugal to continue to be a place where bhikkhus can train and live. Through the life of people using the *Vinaya*, and living the bhikkhu life, there are enough possibilities to continue to be useful to all.

Anumodanā for all the support offered. 🙏

Ajahn Vajiro

A new monastery in New England

'HEY! ARE YOU MONKS?' WE'D BE ASKED, AS WE WALKED OUR DAILY ALMS-ROUNDS THROUGH THE DIVERSE, INHABITED STREETS OF BOSTON AND CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS. Panhandlers, professors, programmers and professionals all seemed respectfully interested in what we were doing, walking with our bowls and living at the rented little townhouse-style apartment we called a *vihāra* in a Boston neighbourhood famous for its immigrants and students, abutting various universities including Harvard and MIT. Yes, we were two monks: myself and Ven. Cāgānando, an American monk of nine *vassas* from the Pacific Hermitage who, along with first Jeff Miller and then John Nishinaga as temporary anagārikas, came to join me for what proved to be a rewarding Rains Retreat in New England.

This was in response to the long-standing request made to Luang Por Sumedho and the Elders' Council by Buddhaparisa, a group of people based in Boston who for fifteen years have been asking to support the establishment of a branch monastery in the area. In the last few years, in consultation with the Sangha in Europe and North America I have worked with them to form the necessary foundations, one result being the creation of a non-profit organization called Jeta Grove which can act as a steward for the Sangha by accepting donations and looking to purchase a suitable property. This year – in the absence of property – we thought to begin in the way other monasteries have begun, by staying temporarily in the city as a way of confirming sufficient interest and getting a sense of where best to look for prospective monastery sites.



Alms-round in Boston.

As fate would have it, very early on in our stay, as Tan Cāgānando and I were beginning to accept the teaching engagements and explore the local alms-round routes that were to provide the structure for our *vassa*, we were serendipitously introduced to a long-time American Buddhist couple with an old farm and forest they had long wished could become the home of a community or monastery. After thirty years of tending carefully to



Ajahn Jayanto and Ven. Cāgānando visit the property.

the land and buildings with this hope in mind, Bruce and Barbara Kantner had almost given up and were preparing finally to put it on the market just as we met. The site is eminently suitable for a forest monastery, secluded and covering 242 acres with a number of well-maintained buildings and a large forest bordering 3,000 acres of National Wildlife Refuge and other protected forestland. It's on the slopes of a mountain in Temple, New Hampshire, a pleasant one and a half hour drive from Boston and central to the New England region.

And what we encountered throughout the region was indeed abundant interest and support. People wherever we





Ajahn Viradhammo visited from Tisarana and joined the Pa Bah (Offering Ceremony) in Boston sponsored by local supporters.



went expressed enthusiasm for having a forest monastery of our tradition in the area. And not a few expressed serious interest in the monastic life. While we made an effort to investigate whatever other potentially suitable properties several estate agents could find, all factors considered nothing came close to the Temple site. As the *vassa* progressed we held a day-long retreat at the farm, and interested locals came too. The local papers have picked up on our interest, and we've met already with some of the 'Town Selectmen' – local officials who would be involved in deciding change-of-use permissions. Ven. Ajahn Viradhammo, whom we visited at Tisarana Monastery in Ontario in September (an eight-hour drive from Boston), kindly agreed to come to the 'Pa Bah' Offering Ceremony some faithful Thai supporters in Boston organized to provide a financial kick-start to the new monastery project, and he joined us for an Open Day at the Temple site to meet with everyone interested and have a look at the land.

We hope a new monastery in the north-east US will be of benefit to many people on into the future. The area is a global centre for learning and research, and is a place where much work in bringing the Buddha's teachings to the West has already taken place. Seeds planted there spread widely. Yet the opportunity to live the *samana* life, and, for anyone, to learn and benefit

from the life of a monastery, is a rare treasure – and until now nearly absent in that region of the world.

One thing this will mean for me is a departure from Amaravati in mid-2014, having lived here since 2006. I will miss the many friends and companions on the Way whom I've had the privilege of knowing in the UK (and the footpaths ... and the NHS ...) It will be the first time I've lived in the States since packing my bags and leaving Boston – my birthplace – for Amaravati as a determined twenty-two-year-old in 1989.

The Kantners have expressed a wish to help make a purchase possible by significantly reducing the price and being as flexible as they feel able to accommodate Jeta Grove's embryonic financial situation. They are also allowing us to begin next year by renting two buildings, with use of the forest, if funds for a purchase are not yet there. We'll see. Interest is high, the time seems right, and the Sangha is willing. All being well, in summer 2014/2557 Temple Forest Monastery will begin its new life.

For more information and to keep in touch by joining the monastery project's mailing list, see:

forestmonastery.org
or jetagroves.us

Ajahn Jayanto



Proposed site for the new monastery in Temple, New Hampshire, USA.

AMARAVATI RETREAT CENTRE

The following retreats and events are held at the Retreat Centre at Amaravati. Please note that the Retreat Centre managers deal only with bookings for Monastic Retreats. For contact details of other organizing groups, please refer to the right-hand column.

Monastic Retreats (led by a monk or a nun)

NEW BOOKING POLICY FOR MONASTIC RETREATS IN 2014:

Please note that bookings for monastic retreats will ONLY be accepted six calendar months before the retreat start date. We do not have facilities to hold booking forms sent early and they will not be processed.

No.	2014	Duration	Teacher & Theme/Title	Booking Opens
R1:	4–6 April	Weekend	Ajahn Gandhasilo	Open
R2:	18–27 April	10 Days	Ajahn Candasiri	Open
R3:	9–13 May	5 Days	Ajahn Jayanto	Open
R4:	2–11 June	10 Days	†Ajahn Amaro & Joseph Kappel <i>Walking the Buddha's Path: The Fruits of Effort.</i>	2 Dec. 2013
R5:	20–24 June	5 Days	Ajahn Bodhipala	20 Dec. 2013
R6:	12–20 July	9 Days	♣Ajahn Kalyāṇo <i>'To die so that we do not die.'</i>	12 Jan. 2014
R7:	1–3 Aug.	Weekend	Ajahn Ahimsako	1 Feb. 2014
R8:	8–12 Aug.	5 Days	Ajahn Anando	8 Feb. 2014
R9:	5–17 Sept.	13 Days	†Ajahn Amaro	5 March 2014
R10:	26–28 Sept.	Weekend	Ajahn Metta	26 March 2014
R11:	10–12 Oct.	Weekend	Ajahn Candasiri & Brother Nicholas <i>Buddhist/Christian</i>	10 April 2014
R12:	24–26 Oct.	Weekend	Teacher TBA <i>Thai language retreat</i>	24 April 2014
R13:	7–11 Nov.	5 Days	Ajahn Nanarato	7 May 2014
R14:	21–30 Nov.	10 Days	♣Ajahn Sucitto & Ajahn Metta	21 May 2014
R15:	12–14 Dec.	Weekend	Ajahn Dhammanando	12 June 2014
R16:	27 Dec.–1 Jan.	6 Days	Ajahn Sundara	27 June 2014

♣We request that you complete a shorter retreat, either at Amaravati or elsewhere, before attending this retreat.

†This retreat is for experienced meditators only who have previously attended a 10-day retreat at Amaravati or elsewhere.

Further information about booking retreats:

As mentioned above, any booking form sent early will not be processed. You will have to reapply once booking is open. This is being introduced to give everyone a chance to fully commit to attending a retreat once a place is offered. For bookings and information please visit www.amaravati.org (Retreat Centre), email retreats@amaravati.org or ring 01442 843239.

All weekend retreats are suitable for people new to meditation as well as those who have not attended a retreat before. It is advisable to attend a weekend retreat before booking a longer retreat. Due to high demand, there is a limit of three retreats per person per year.

Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form which can be downloaded from the website, or requested from the Retreat Centre. Please send your booking form by post. No booking fee is required. Donations are welcomed at the end of retreats.

Registration is from 4.00-7.00 p.m. on the first day of the retreat. Weekend retreats end at 5.00 p.m., longer retreats end after lunch.

Please note that the Amaravati Retreat Schedule is no longer published first in this newsletter. If you wish to receive the very first posting of each year's schedule of retreats, please subscribe to receive *Looking Ahead* by email or post (see following page) or check via the Retreat Centre website at www.amaravati.org.

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA)

Retreats and Days of Practice (led by an experienced layperson). For bookings and information please visit www.buddhacommunity.org

2014

11 Jan.	Day of Practice
8 Feb.	Day of Practice
8 March	Day of Practice
11–13 April	Weekend Retreat
17 May	Day of Practice
13–15 June	Weekend Retreat
5 July	Day of Practice
19–23 Sept.	5-day Retreat
18 Oct.	Day of Practice
1 Nov.	Day of Practice
20 Dec.	Day of Practice

Buddhist Women's Network (BWN)

Retreats and Days of Practice (led by an experienced laywoman). For bookings and information please contact Shirley McDonald at shirleymcdonald@hotmail.co.uk

2014

9 March	Day of Practice
6 July	Day of Practice
29–31 Aug.	Weekend Retreat
19 Oct.	Day of Practice
21 Dec.	Day of Practice

Family Events

For bookings and information please visit www.family.amaravati.org or contact Joy Love at joy.love@virginmedia.com

2014

2–5 May	Rainbows Weekend
27–29 June	► Family Camp Weekend
16–24 Aug.	◄ Family Camp
14–16 Nov.	Young Persons' Weekend (Age 13–18)
5–7 Dec.	Creative Weekend (Age 18+)

► For new families.

◄ For families who have attended a family event before.

GRAPEVINE

Where to find news and announcements from the monasteries

Now that *Forest Sangha Newsletter* is published once a year, much of the news from the monasteries formerly provided here on the Grapevine is instead published elsewhere. Below is a guide to how you can get news from many of the monasteries. The postal address and contact details for each monastery can be found on the back page.

'Portal' website: www.forestsangha.org

www.forestsangha.org acts as a portal to Ajahn Chah branch monasteries with non-Thai resident Sanghas. News and announcements can be found on the **Current News** page, as well as by following the links under **Newsletters**.

Books and audio: www.forestsanghapublications.org

Visit www.forestsanghapublications.org for free distribution books and audio from the monastic communities of Ajahn Chah.

Amaravati

Announcements can be found on the website, www.amaravati.org. Amaravati now has its own quarterly bulletin, called *Looking Ahead* (also available on the website). Subscribe to receive this by email or by post, at *Looking Ahead*, Amaravati, or at abmnews@amaravati.org

Aruna Ratanagiri (Harnham)

Look under **News** on the website www.ratanagiri.org.uk for links to a blog, announcements, retreats and more, including the monastery newsletter, *Hilltop*. To receive *Hilltop* by post or by email, write to Sangha Office, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, or email sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk

Cittaviveka (Chithurst)

For an email containing Cittaviveka's seasonal newsletter, write to the monastery or go to the website www.cittaviveka.org where you can subscribe on the **News** webpage.

Hartridge (Devon)

See the **Announcements** page on their website: www.hartridgemonastery.org. Hartridge periodically produces a newsletter: contact the monastery to sign up to receive it.

Dhammapala (Switzerland)

In addition to announcements posted on their German-language website www.dhammapala.ch, Dhammapala produces an annual newsletter available in German, English, French and Thai. Download it from the website, or to subscribe write to the monastery or email info@dhammapala.ch

Santacittarama (Italy)

Santacittarama has a website with an English as well as Italian version (a Thai version is in the works): www.santacittarama.org. News can be found there as well as a digital newsletter; to subscribe to this, email the monastery at sangha@santacittarama.org

Bodhinyanarama (New Zealand)

For news and announcements and to download their newsletter, go to Bodhinyanarama's website: www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz. To receive the newsletter by email or post, write to the monastery or email sangha.nz@gmail.com

Abhayagiri (USA)

Updated news and announcements can be found on Abhayagiri's website, www.abhayagiri.org

GROUPS & CONTACTS

The list below includes people who have had contact with the Sangha over the years, who in most cases sponsor regular sitting groups in their area. Please note that the Sangha does not explicitly endorse or take responsibility for any of these people or their activities.

England

Bath	Anne Armitage	(01225) 859217
Banbury	Sarah Wallis	(01295) 278744
Basingstoke	Alan Marshall email: malan231@aol.com	(07425) 175974
Bedford	David Stubbs	(01234) 720892
Wokingham	Anthea West	(0118) 979 8196
Brentwood	Richard Burch	(01277) 626225
Brighton – Bodhi Garden	(www.bodhigarden.org):	
	David Glendinging	(01273) 723378
Bristol	Lisa Daix	(0117) 935 0272
Cambridge	Meg Clarke	(01223) 424357
Canterbury	Charles Watters	(01227) 463342
Carlisle	Jean Nelson	(01228) 546259
Chichester	Tony Halter	(01243) 672126
Cookham, Maidenhead	Emily Tomalin	(01628) 810083
Hemel Hempstead – Bodhinyana Group:	Chris Ward	(01442) 890034
Kendal – Buddhist Group of Kendal	(bgkt@etherway.net):	
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Leeds Area	Daniela Loeb	(01132) 791375
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London Buddhist Society,	58 Eccleston Square, London SW1	(0207) 834 5858
London Hampstead	Caroline Randall	(0208) 348 0537
	Ann Booth	(0207) 485 0505
London West	Nick Carroll	(07973) 372 391
Maidstone – Alokabodhi Buddhist Group:	Shirley (01622) 203751	or Tim (01622) 726414
Newcastle	Ian Plagaro-Neill	(0191) 469 2778
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Newmarket	Richard Prangnell & Rosie Hitchins	(01638) 603286, rprangnell@gmail.com , www.bodhimanda.org
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Machynlleth, Wales	Geoffrey Carter & Shamsia Sandra Sunfire	(01650) 511513
Pembrokeshire, S. Wales		
	Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson	(01239) 820790
A Coruña, Spain	David Williams	(+34) (981) 431 436



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Associated Monasteries

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Monastery Trust

Cittaviveka

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Pacific Hermitage

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(Visit website for mailing address.)
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Vimokharama Hermitage

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Dhammagiri Forest Hermitage

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NEW ZEALAND

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To receive the *Forest Sangha*
Newsletter in Thailand, please
write to Amaravati.

For more resources and information,
please also see the Sangha
portal website:
www.forestsangha.org

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